

Stories of terror
from the shadow-land of inner space

Mind in Chains

Edited by **Dr. Christopher Evans**



Panther

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If order, harmony, a peaceful life, is our ideal – why do so many readers relish excursions into the no man's land of the horror story?

The conclusion that the editor – a practising psychologist – of this anthology comes to is that, despite our yearnings for an ordered existence, life is a risky business, and that horror stories provide us with, so to speak, a trial run which we can control or terminate at any stage of the game.

Here, then, are fourteen excursions into the dark lands of 'inner space'. They skirt you along such cliff edges as the idea of *eternity*, the idea of *Hell* – in its powerful ancient sense, *premonitions of death* – and the *moment of death*. And a number of other mind-boggling themes.

*Dr. Christopher Evans – whose previous anthology of horror stories, *Mind at Bay*, is a bestseller – is the co-author of a theory of dreaming which has attracted wide attention. He works in the Computer Science Division of the National Physical Laboratory.

Mind in Chains

fourteen horror stories

selected and with an introduction by
Dr. Christopher Evans

Panther

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Introduction

The great psychologist, William James, once remarked that to the newborn infant the world around it would appear as a 'buzzing blooming confusion'. In other words, our brains, from the time we emerge from the limited quietude of the womb, strive to interpret and make order out of the chaos of the physical environment. Through infancy, childhood and maturity the magnificent decoding devices in our heads gradually master the complex messages that are fed in through the sense organs and we steadily begin to perceive a significant structuring of the environment, at the same time gathering together our own sense of identity and self-awareness. The brain, or mind if you like, therefore has as its primary task the construction of a stable picture of the material universe in which our bodies swim, and the preservation of a special relationship between this and the internal environment where personality and consciousness dwell.

Thus we find that wherever we go and whatever we do – within certain broad limits – the world, its activities and its inhabitants appear at least relatively comprehensible, meaningful and tolerable. The phrase 'within certain limits' is the key one of course. For at various points in our lives we step into territory where the cerebral decoders meet unfamiliar signals and either respond incorrectly or withdraw defeated and in fear. For most of us these moments are rare – a nightmare, a strange personal experience, a moment of jolting fright – and are easily rationalized. For others the shadow land is entered more frequently and in the case of the psychotic or the insane, the 'real' world is itself a penumbra of incomprehension and unease.

If then, our brains are equipped and motivated to convert chaos into order, why do most normal people relish those deliberate ventures into the no man's land which horror fiction provides? There are a number of possible answers to this question. The one that I favour, as a psychologist, is based on the idea that living creatures which lead a hazardous and risky life must learn to accept as 'normal' a certain number of frights and scares in the course of a lifetime. Thus adventures of this kind are basically 'pleasurable' in an outré and slightly anomalous way – the more so

when they are entered into willingly and with the implicit assumption that they can be controlled or terminated at any stage of the game.

Readers of the introduction to my previous anthology, *The Mind at Bay*, will recall that my interest in horror fiction is principally that of an individual attempting to map the borders of what J. G. Ballard has called 'Inner Space' – the vast universe inside the mind where submarines, time capsules and rocket ships can never penetrate. Entry into these strange regions may be attempted in a multitude of ways, and the route provided by specialist fiction is particularly attractive because it is so freely accessible. There are red herrings of course. Certain horrors, notably the Gothic with blood-stained walls, dripping dungeons and the clank of phantom chains, seem to be losing their power – no doubt because this area of fiction is now too well mapped, the grass trodden down with the feet of millions of adventurers. But as the world turns and man looks further outward and also ever more deeply into himself, new and virgin lands are revealed. In this collection I have attempted a cross-section of themes and ideas, some covering old ground and some entirely new. It is a personal and not totally detached selection. The reader may care to compare his psychology with mine by assessing my choice and deciding whether there are any major gaps which he would fill. He should look then quizzically at his alternative selections and strive to see what they tell him about the structure and the denizens of his own internal landscape.

Christopher Evans

By all the agreed rules of the Universe (or those that are fashionable at the moment) time passes in a steady flow, the past sliding away into obscurity, the present existing only as a fleeting, indefinable moment and the future with no reality of its own until it suddenly becomes the present. Though there is little concrete evidence to tell us that this view of time is probably restricted and naive, our intuition, whatever that may be worth, hints that scientists will some day cause us to rethink our current attitudes to past, present and future. Will the future then acquire a new reality? And what is to happen to us if it does – will we suddenly be able to take controlled peeps ahead in time to establish the winner of the Derby, or, less pleasantly, the time and date of our own death? Perhaps there are some people who even now can occasionally lift the veil and inspect, if rather hazily, the pattern of future events. Folklore and popular mythology suggest that this is so, and Saki's 'The Cobweb' plays this eerie theme with delicate skill. The premonition of death is an old, old horror, too plausible by far for many people's tastes.

The Cobweb

by Saki

The farmhouse kitchen probably stood where it did as a matter of accident or haphazard choice; yet its situation might have been planned by a master-strategist in farmhouse architecture. Dairy and poultry-yard, and herb garden, and all the busy places of the farm seemed to lead by easy access into its wide flagged haven, where there was room for everything and where muddy boots left traces that were easily swept away. And yet, for all that it stood so well in the centre of human bustle, its long, latticed window, with the wide window-seat, built into an embrasure beyond the huge fireplace, looked out on a wild spreading view of hill and heather and wooded combe. The window nook made almost a little room in itself, quite the pleasantest room in the farm as far as situation and capabilities went. Young Mrs. Ladbruk, whose husband had just come into the farm by way of

inheritance, cast covetous eyes on this snug corner, and her fingers itched to make it bright and cozy with chintz curtains and bowls of flowers, and a shelf or two of old china. The musty farm parlour, looking out to a prim, cheerless garden imprisoned within high, blank walls, was not a room that lent itself readily either to comfort or decoration.

'When we are more settled I shall work wonders in the way of making the kitchen habitable,' said the young woman to her occasional visitors. There was an unspoken wish in those words, a wish which was unconfessed as well as unspoken. Emma Ladbruk was the mistress of the farm; jointly with her husband she might have her say, and to a certain extent her way, in ordering its affairs. But she was not mistress of the kitchen.

On one of the shelves of an old dresser, in company with chipped sauce-boats, pewter jugs, cheese-graters, and paid bills, rested a worn and ragged Bible, on whose front page was the record, in faded ink, of a baptism dated ninety-four years ago. 'Martha Crale' was the name written on that yellow page. The yellow, wrinkled old dame who hobbled and muttered about the kitchen, looking like a dead autumn leaf which the winter winds still pushed hither and thither, had once been Martha Crale; for seventy odd years she had been Martha Mountjoy. For longer than anyone could remember she had pattered to and fro between oven and wash-house and dairy and out to chicken-run and garden, grumbling and muttering and scolding, but working unceasingly. Emma Ladbruk, of whose coming she took as little notice as she would of a bee wandering in at a window on a summer's day, used at first to watch her with a kind of frightened curiosity. She was so old and so much a part of the place, it was difficult to think of her exactly as a living thing. Old Shep, the white-nozzled, stiff-limbed collie, waiting for his time to die, seemed almost more human than the withered, dried-up old woman. He had been a riotous, roistering puppy, mad with the joy of life, when she was already a tottering, hobbling dame; now he was just a blind, breathing carcase, nothing more, and she still worked with frail energy, still swept and baked and washed, fetched and carried. If there were something in these wise old dogs that did not perish utterly with death, Emma used to think to herself, what generations of ghost-dogs there must be out on those hills, that Martha had reared and fed and tended and

spoken a last good-bye word to in that old kitchen. And what memories she must have of human generations that had passed away in her time. It was difficult for anyone, let alone a stranger like Emma, to get her to talk of the days that had been; her shrill, quavering speech was of doors that had been left unfastened, pails that had got mislaid, calves whose feeding-time was overdue, and the various little faults and lapses that chequer a farmhouse routine. Now and again, when election time came round, she would unstore her recollections of the old names round which the fight had waged in the days gone by. There had been a Palmerston, that had been a name down Tiverton way; Tiverton was not a far journey as the crow flies, but to Martha it was almost a foreign country. Later there had been Northcotes and Aclands, and many other newer names that she had forgotten; the names changed, but it was always Libruls and Toories, Yellows and Blues. And they always quarrelled and shouted as to who was right and who was wrong. The one they quarrelled about most was a fine old gentleman with an angry face – she had seen his picture on the walls. She had seen it on the floor too, with a rotten apple squashed over it, for the farm had changed its politics from time to time. Martha had never been on one side or the other; none of ‘they’ had ever done the farm a stroke of good. Such was her sweeping verdict, given with all a peasant’s distrust of the outside world.

When the half-frightened curiosity had somewhat faded away, Emma Ladbruk was uncomfortably conscious of another feeling towards the old woman. She was a quaint old tradition, lingering about the place, she was part and parcel of the farm itself, she was something at once pathetic and picturesque – but she was dreadfully in the way. Emma had come to the farm full of plans for little reforms and improvements, in part the result of training in the newest ways and methods, in part the outcome of her own ideas and fancies. Reforms in the kitchen region, if those deaf old ears could have been induced to give them even a hearing, would have met with short shrift and scornful rejection, and the kitchen region spread over the zone of dairy and market business and half the work of the household. Emma, with the latest science of dead-poultry dressing at her fingertips, sat by, an unheeded watcher, while old Martha trussed the chickens for the market-stall as she had trussed them for nearly four-score years – all leg

and no breast. And the hundred hints anent effective cleaning and labour-lightening and the things that make for wholesomeness which the young woman was ready to impart or to put into action dropped away into nothingness before that wan, muttering, unheeding presence. Above all, the coveted window corner, that was to be a dainty, cheerful oasis in the gaunt old kitchen, stood now choked and lumbered with a litter of odds and ends that Emma, for all her nominal authority, would not have dared or cared to displace; over them seemed to be spun the protection of something that was like a human cobweb. Decidedly Martha was in the way. It would have been an unworthy meanness to have wished to see the span of that brave old life shortened by a few paltry months, but as the days sped by Emma was conscious that the wish was there, disowned though it might be, lurking at the back of her mind.

She felt the meanness of the wish come over her with a qualm of self-reproach one day when she came into the kitchen and found an unaccustomed state of things in that usually busy quarter. Old Martha was not working. A basket of corn was on the floor by her side, and out in the yard the poultry were beginning to clamour a protest of overdue feeding-time. But Martha sat huddled in a shrunken bunch on the window seat, looking out with her dim old eyes as though she saw something stranger than the autumn landscape.

'Is anything the matter, Martha?' asked the young woman.

'Tis death, 'tis death a-coming,' answered the quavering voice; 'I knew 'twere coming. I knew it. 'Tweren't for nothing that old Shep's been howling all morning. An' last night I heard the screech-owl give the death-cry, and there were something white as run across the yard yesterday; 'tweren't a cat or a stoat, 'twere something. The fowls knew 'twere something; they all drew off to one side. Ay, there's been warnings. I knew it were a-coming.'

The young woman's eyes clouded with pity. The old thing sitting there so white and shrunken had once been a merry, noisy child, playing about in lanes and hay-lofts and farmhouse garrets; that had been eighty odd years ago, and now she was just a frail old body cowering under the approaching chill of the death that was coming at last to take her. It was not probable that much could be done for her, but Emma hastened away to get

assistance and counsel. Her husband, she knew, was down at a tree-felling some little distance off, but she might find some other intelligent soul who knew the old woman better than she did. The farm, she soon found out, had that faculty common to farmyards of swallowing up and losing its human population. The poultry followed her in interested fashion, and swine grunted interrogations at her from behind the bars of their sties, but barnyard and rickyard, orchard and stables and dairy, gave no reward to her search. Then, as she retraced her steps towards the kitchen, she came suddenly on her cousin, young Mr. Jim, as everyone called him, who divided his time between amateur horse-dealing, rabbit-shooting, and flirting with the farm maids.

'I'm afraid old Martha is dying,' said Emma. Jim was not the sort of person to whom one had to break news gently.

'Nonsense,' he said; 'Martha means to live to a hundred. She told me so, and she'll do it.'

'She may be actually dying at this moment, or it may just be the beginning of the break-up,' persisted Emma, with a feeling of contempt for the slowness and dullness of the young man.

A grin spread over his good-natured features.

'It don't look like it,' he said, nodding towards the yard. Emma turned to catch the meaning of his remark. Old Martha stood in the middle of a mob of poultry scattering handfuls of grain around her. The turkey-cock, with the bronzed sheen of his feathers and the purple-red of his wattles, the gamecock with the glowing metallic lustre of his Eastern plumage, the hens, with their ochres and buffs and umbers and their scarlet combs, and the drakes, with their bottle-green heads, made a medley of rich colour, in the centre of which the old woman looked like a withered stalk standing amid the riotous growth of gaily-hued flowers. But she threw the grain deftly amid the wilderness of beaks, and her quavering voice carried as far as the two people who were watching her. She was still harping on the theme of death coming to the farm.

'I knew 'twere a-coming. There's been signs an' warnings.'

'Who's dead, then, old Mother?' called out the young man.

''Tis young Mister Ladbruk,' she shrilled back; 'they've just a-carried his body in. Run out of the way of a tree that was coming down an' ran hisself on to an iron post. Dead when they

picked un up. Ay, I knew 'twere coming.'

And she turned to fling a handful of barley at a belated group of guinea-fowl that came racing towards her.

The farm was a family property, and passed to the rabbit-shooting cousin as the next-of-kin. Emma Ladbruk drifted out of its history as a bee that had wandered in at an open window might flit its way out again. On a cold grey morning she stood waiting with her boxes already stowed in the farm cart, till the last of the market produce should be ready, for the train she was to catch was of less importance than the chickens and butter and eggs that were to be offered for sale. From where she stood she could see an angle of the long latticed window that was to have been cozy with curtains and gay with bowls of flowers. Into her mind came the thought that for months, perhaps for years, long after she had been utterly forgotten, a white, unheeding face would be seen peering out through those latticed panes, and a weak muttering voice would be heard quavering up and down those flagged passages. She made her way to a narrow barred casement that opened into the farm larder. Old Martha was standing at a table trussing a pair of chickens for the market stall as she had trussed them for nearly fourscore years.

Of all mankind's unpleasant habits, sheer and wilful cruelty is the most base, the least forgivable and, when carried to its extreme, perhaps the most horrific. Yet in some peculiar way, it is also one of the most understandable, for the veneer of civilization lies thin on most human societies. Under extreme stress, of which war is probably the most obvious example, men may inflict horrors on their fellow men which transcend any treatment that one animal would hand out to another. I have chosen Brian Aldiss's 'Faceless Card' to expound this particular vein, for it deals with an aspect of human cruelty which is perhaps the most unsettling and yet by no means the least common. The story is set in a future which could be closer than we care to think, and it hypothesizes a society where the infliction of prolonged, contrived mental torment by one citizen on another is deliberately encouraged as a means of prodding a complacent humanity into action. The 'faceless card' in question is there to remind man of the animal drives and motives which he must occasionally exercise if his species is to survive. This early Aldiss is described by the author as 'one of the few true horror stories I have written'.

Faceless Card

by Brian W. Aldiss

As soon as Paul Stoneward saw Nigel Alexander come into Darwin's Dive, the killing instinct blossomed in him like a wonderful flower. I can just imagine how it was inside Paul; every little cell waking, growing teeth, turning into sharks yawning.

Even in the most static society like ours, men divide off into hunters and hunted, wolves and sheep. Paul Stoneward was a hunter born, with a way of his own about stalking the prey.

Mr. Nigel Alexander was prey. He had it stamped all over him. Ordinary citizen. Safety first. Ideas keep out. He came into the Dive at a slow trot, moving on his heels as if his toes had corns. He foamed a little from a mouth as wide as a ditch with unaccustomed exertion. Brushing past Stoneward, he sat down

at his table and peered anxiously through the net-curtained window.

'Someone you don't want to see?' Stoneward asked.

Nigel Alexander looked at his table companion for the first time and then back out of the window.

'Just a business acquaintance,' he muttered. 'You know how it is.'

His nerves all alert, Paul Stoneward looked him over, heard him absently order an old-fashioned bromo when the waiter came. Alexander was neatly dressed; Stoneward placed him as a man with money who had no notion how to spend it. A man with half his life ahead who had no notion how to use it. Prey: Handle With Cruelty.

A youngster, slick and spick, drew up outside the bar and hesitated. He danced about, then entered. He noticed Alexander, pretended to be surprised, and came over to the table. His pale face shone with pleasure.

'Hi, boss,' he said eagerly. 'I sure wasn't sure I didn't see that familiar back of yours ahead of me. What's it to be? Mind if I sit down?'

'I've already ordered, Johnny,' Alexander said miserably. 'I was just talking to my friend here. . . .'

It did not dislodge the newcomer one bit. He sat down, put his elbows on the table top and nodded friendly fashion to Stoneward. 'Howdy, I'm Johnny J. Flower, Mr. Alexander's chief clerk. Glad to know you.'

He was the up-and-creeping generation. No dandruff. No shyness. No doubts, no halitosis. No nothing. He began to chatter happily about 'the business', how well they were doing, how good it was working for Mr. Alexander. Mr. Alexander tried to join in the choruses, bought the boy a pep-up and fizz, smiled, nodded like an old nag.

Business could have been better. 'The N-Compass Co.' had its troubles. The public just was not buying taped books like it used and that was a hard, gilt-edged fact nobody could buck. No matter how much publicity N-Compass put out for its clients, nobody could buck that gilt-edged fact. Even Mr. Alexander with a smart head clerk like Johnny J. Flower could not buck that basic, gilt-edged fact. But they had done well to win the handling of the publicity for President da Silva's Memoirs; that

was a big consignment. Everyone present would surely agree President da Silva was a big guy.

'Surely,' agreed Stoneward, when their two pairs of cow eyes, hazel and green but so similar, turned to him, pleading with him to roll the ball along and say 'Surely'.

Why, da Silva was the guy who instigated the Amazon Basin scheme . . . billions of credits . . . da Silva was the guy who gave the big yes to the A.A.A., the Automated Agriculture Act. . . . Yuh, a big guy . . . N-Compass ought to be made with da Silva's book.

Finally Johnny said he should be getting along.

'Off you go, boy; I'll be along,' Mr. Alexander said, half tough, half cajoling. This obviously was not how Johnny wanted it played. He liked the rest of the N-Compass staff to see him turn up with the boss, arm-in-arm, you-kiss-mine-etc. Still, he got up and went with grace, social to his clean, clean fingertips.

Paul Stoneward drank in every second of the session as if it were wine. If there was anything he loved, it was seeing the mentally dead pretend they were mentally alive. All the time that he was watching and hating Alexander and the clerk, I was sitting at the other end of the bar watching and hating Stoneward; it's my profession.

'Nice boy, Johnny. Don't know how I'd manage without him,' Alexander said, wiping under his collar with a silk handkerchief. He was getting flabby. His new collar made it clear he needed a new neck.

'But you were trying to dodge him,' Stoneward said lightly. He could prise this old fool open like a piggy-bank.

'Oh, well, yes. . . . That's another thing. It's just - well, never mind. I don't think I even caught your name, sir. Paul Stoneward? Fine; never forget a name - doesn't pay in my line of business, no sir. You see, Johnny is a very smart and bright young feller - well, you saw for yourself. . . .'

'You wouldn't say Johnny was a bore?' Paul Stoneward put the delicate point tentatively. You would not say Johnny was a smarm, a snide, a creeper, a dully without one inkling, an ostrich, a jerk who was galloping blind from cradle to grave (like you, Mr. Alexander) - in short, an ideal, approved integrated citizen of this approved and misbegotten Age of Content?

'Why, Johnny's a real live-wire, Mr. Stoneward,' Alexander

said, with mild indignation. 'I only said to my wife this morning, "Penelope, Johnny's going places"; and I'm not a man to make a mistake.'

Not much, you old blabbermouth. Of course you can't see what Johnny is, just as the blind can't see the blind. And what the hell places do you think Johnny could possibly be going to, when there are no longer any places worth going to? And what sort of romance do you and Penelope make when you are in your bed clothes? And if you knew I *long* – but *long* – to tear your typical existence apart from top to bottom. . . .

'It is of course a very great honour and pleasure to meet a man of your perspicacity and position,' Stoneward said, crinkling his eyebrows into Mexican moustaches to increase the unction. 'My place is only just round the corner from here. May I ask you up there with me now? I would be delighted to mix you another old-fashioned bromo.'

At once, Alexander looked nervous. His face took on the puckered look it had worn when he first entered the bar. Stoneward could not quite account for the expression. Goddam it, even these Normals had their little personal quirks; since it irritated him to feel he did not know every last grey inch of Alexander's soul, he promptly forgot the thought.

Alexander glanced at his watch.

'The business . . .' he said apologetically. 'Most hospitable of you. . . .'

'I'm sorry, Mr. Alexander,' Stoneward said, lowering his eyes and easing huskiness into his voice. 'I should have remembered what a busy man you are. It's just – well, I'm lonely, let's face it. There's no Penelope for me. . . . Just my little old self. . . . Existence sometimes grows a wee bit . . . solitary.'

Don't ham it too much, kid, and don't spoil it all by laughing in his face. You've got him now; look, his eyes are misting. Love in a mystery. These slobs are stuffed rotten with kindness – you just have to touch the right button and out it oozes like diarrhoea.

'I'm genuinely sorry to learn that, Mr. Stoneward,' the boss of N-Compass was saying. 'Say, call me Nigel, why don't you, and I'll call you Paul. I like to be friends with folk. I guess we all get lonely at times – even a happy-married man like myself. Like I

always say, Paul, life is just a big question mark. Sometimes at night, when your corns are playing you up. . . .’

‘You mean – you mean you *will* come on round to my place?’ Stoneward said, brightening convulsively. He could not bother even to put on a genuine act – this Alexander was too rancid to smell a stink. Subtlety is wasted on suckers.

‘Well, I didn’t say that. . . .’

‘Ah, come on – *Nigel*. You’d like my room. Besides . . . well, I’ve gotten to regard you as a friend, I guess.’

‘Don’t like to say no,’ Alexander murmured, rising obediently to his feet when Stoneward did. For all his smart suiting, he looked baggy, like a fat sheep off to a ritzy abattoir, as Stoneward took his arm and led him into the sedate streets.

I left shortly after but did not follow them. Instead, I took a taxi to H.Q. Man, was I mad!

Mr. Nigel Alexander was really uneasy. He chewed a toothpick to splinters. He plucked at the armpits of his shirt to ease the damp patches off his skin. When he spoke, standing in the middle of Stoneward’s room, he gazed unhappily down at the squared toes of his shoes.

‘Er . . . you aren’t an artist, by any chance, Paul, are you? No offence, I mean, and you’ll have guessed by now that I’m a pretty liberal man, but I mean I just have to ask the once. These pictures on your walls. . . . And that naked statue. . . .’

Stoneward perched himself on the edge of his desk, swung his neat legs, folded his competent hands, smiled dagger-fashion, looked artistic.

‘Why now, Nigel,’ he said with sham surprise, ‘you know as well as I do that such things as artists don’t exist any more! This is the Age of Content, when all maladjusted and non-functional groups like artists or fictioneers or drunkards have melted away. Everyone is adjusted, normal, *happy*.’

‘Sure, sure,’ Alexander said hurriedly, nodding rather too much. ‘I just thought . . . these pictures . . . I mean, don’t they rather look back to the old decadent pre-Content set-up? . . . I mean, I know you are unmarried. . . .’

Stoneward walked over to the drug cabinet and began to mix two old-fashioneds, saying casually as he did so, ‘You could say I

was an artist in a way. There's something else that has died out and is now forgotten or forbidden: I'm an artist in the art of life.'

This floored Alexander. He adjusted his damp shirt again and wiped his fingertips on the silk handkerchief. He tried a laugh.

'Oh, you're mistaken there, Paul. Your concept, if you'll pardon me, is awry. Life is not an *art*. It's - well, it's natural. I don't intend any rudeness when I say you are mistaken. But life, well, it's just something you *live*, I guess. I know Penelope would see it like that. You just live life; it doesn't need any thought. Not the way business needs thought, for instance. I can't see what you mean. I mean, I just don't see it.'

Carrying the two glasses carefully, Stoneward brought them over to the low oval table and set them down. He produced a box of mescahales and a lighter and set those down. He waved his hand to the chairs, sitting in one when his guest dubiously did and curling his long legs under him.

'Penelope is a very attractive name,' he said ingratiatingly.

'Oh, yes, a very attractive name. My favourite name, in fact,' Alexander said, grateful as a dog for the abrupt change of subject.

'Well,' Stoneward said, raising his glass, 'here's to the widow of bashful fifteen and to the cadaver of forty, to the clean little woman who's slightly unclean and the sports girl who's out-and-out sporty.'

'I hadn't heard that one before,' Alexander said, with glum embarrassment, again examining his toe-caps. He leant well forward and pursed his thick mauve lips to drink.

'Let's talk intimately,' Stoneward said, as if struck by this sudden good idea. 'Just you and I, Mr. Nigel Alexander, with no souls barred. In every age, in every clime, a man's breast or a woman's breasts harbour secrets - nothing bad, just little sensitive things to be kept away from the common gaze. Clouds of immortality and suchlike lush things. Let's have ours out now, right here, confidentially, and see how intimate we can get. What say?'

A driblet went down the plumpening chin and plopped on the table top. The hankie appeared and mopped the plop. The plump hand waved away a proffered mescahale.

'Frankly, I don't follow your meaning, Paul. I have no secrets.

Well – business secrets, naturally. . . . But I think you are presuming just a little on our acquaintanceship, if I may be allowed to put it that way. Secrets? Why should a normal man have secrets?’

‘Penelope,’ Stoneward barked, shooting out his legs, dropping his voice and repeating, ‘Penelope: no secrets from her? Not even teeny, weeny ones?’

‘No, no, not even – er, teeny, weeny ones. I can say that quite honestly. I love my wife very dearly, Mr. Stoneward, the way a decent citizen should, please believe me. Any secrets we may have are very properly shared. Furthermore, as a property owner, I feel I have every right . . . every right to say . . . the gosh . . . every right . . .’

He had drained his glass and now he was asleep. He rolled over like a bullock on clover, beginning to snore as the knock-out drops took firmer hold of him. The lines of his face grew relaxed and generous.

‘Every right!’ Stoneward echoed, standing over him. ‘Yes, you’ve every right to be caught like a porker in a trap. You didn’t want to come here, yet you had to, because you scented loneliness, sniffed it right up your old nostrils. You thought it was like calling to like, you pomaded porker, because inside – though you don’t know it! – you’re just as miserable as all the other Normals. . . . No, that’s foisting my diagnosis on to him. He hasn’t enough know-how to be miserable; that takes talent. He’s just a bucket of lard.’

Bending, he felt distastefully inside the breast pocket of the sleeping man, drawing out his wallet. In it was a red identity card stamped NORMAL. Sure it was normal – it was so normal, only one man in a million was anything else these days. On the back cover of the folder, under the bovinely solemn reproduction of Mr. Nigel *Hamilton* Alexander’s physiognomy, were his home and his business addresses.

‘Good,’ Stoneward said. He picked the lighter from the table, ignited it, and extinguished it against the grey spread of Alexander’s underjowl. The sleeping man never stirred.

Saying ‘Good’ again, Stoneward went over to the phone and dialled. He had thought of an artistic touch. Switching off the vision, he waited for a female voice to coo ‘N-Compass Co. Coverage and Publicity’, and then asked for Johnny Flower.

'The boss won't be in today, Johnny,' he said apologetically, when the clerk's dime-a-dozen purr replied. 'I wouldn't like this bit of news to get around, but Nigel Alexander is off on a benzedrine bust with a busty junkie called Jean. She'll toss him right back at you when she's finished with him.'

He cut off the incoherent noises at the other end of the line, smiled affectionately to himself and dialled through to Civilian Sanctions. He tuned the vision circuits in again in time to see the girl at the main desk switch him right through to the Commissioner.

'Beynon?' Stoneward said. He was always clipped, staccato, every inch the operative with Commissioner Beynon, because that was how he responded to Beynon's personality. 'I'm on a new consignment from date. Target: Citizen BIOX 95005, Alexander, N.H. Usual objective: to awaken the man's dormant powers of life-awareness. Strictly off the record, I don't think Alexander has any to awaken.'

'Don't make this job too expensive,' Beynon warned. 'The Peace Department are having a stiff enough job as it is convincing the Police that you have Congress backing. I advise you to go easy, Stoneward.'

'Message received and understood,' Stoneward said. 'Everything fine and formal, Normal.'

Beynon cut contact, turning to me. 'How I'd like to see that louse behind bars!' he exclaimed. 'I can quite grasp that ultimately he may be doing good, but I don't like to see nice, honest citizens suffer; and I *don't* like the obvious pleasure he gets out of it all. What do you think he's up to, Kelly?'

'He'll be after Alexander's wife now,' I told the Commissioner, 'because that's the way his nasty little mind works.'

She stood with a vase full of cactus dahlias in one hand. She wore a little apron over a fawn and white dress. She had curly chestnut hair and surprising grey eyes. She was slenderly, tenderly shaped. She was some years younger than her husband. She smiled rather helplessly, entirely charmingly.

'I was just doing the flowers,' she said.

'I won't keep you long, Mrs. Alexander - Penelope,' Stoneward said; he had changed into a dark, dapper suit and looked ceaseless, creaseless. He put a calculated amount of warmth into

his voice and added, 'I've so often heard your husband call you Penelope, it seems more natural for me to call you that too. Would you mind?'

'How long have you known my husband, Mr. Stoneward?' she asked, smiling but ignoring his question.

'We've been friends for years, really close friends,' Stoneward said, clasping his hands ingeniously to suggest ingenuousness. 'I'm just so surprised he never mentioned me to you. I mean . . . why should he have secrets from you?'

The little jab did not appear to sink in. Perhaps Penelope also would prove to be insensitive – but he found himself hoping not. That gentle exterior, it should not be hard to wound.

'Why indeed?' she said. 'How long did you say you have known my husband?'

'I've known Ni since . . . let's see. . . Oh, since seven years or more. We met when he was blowing the fanfares for my book on Human Sex, and that was in twenty fifteen. Come to think of it, perhaps that's why he never mentions me; sex isn't always considered respectable. What sort of a reception does it get in this house, Penelope?'

She set the vase with a bump on the window ledge and turned smartly. This girl's legs consisted of an infinite number of points it was imperative to kiss. Steady, Stoneward, the outward display of her might look lively, but the vital grey matter would be dead: how else could you explain her marriage to N.H.A.?

'If you have anything important to say, Mr. Stoneward, would you please say it and leave? I am rather busy this morning.'

'Yes, I've something to say,' he told her, sitting on the arm of a chair and stretching his legs. He laughed ruefully. 'Trouble is, I'm not keen to say it. I'm afraid you will be shocked.'

'If you will tell me, I will tell you if I am shocked,' she said, attempting to humour him.

'Okay. Penelope, sweet though you are, Nigel has left you for another woman, the cad.'

'You are talking nonsense,' she said.

'I am speaking the truth. He has tired of you at last, the old dog. Every man his own Romeo.'

'You are talking nonsense. I don't believe you have even met my husband,' she said sharply.

'He has gone off with a blonde double-breasted girl called Jean

with hep hips and sigh-size thighs who is old enough to be his mother and big enough to be his father,' he lied.

She picked up the vase of dahlias again, in case a weapon were needed. All the interlocking softnesses of her face had frozen hard.

'Get out!' she shouted. 'You're drunk.'

'No, it's true!' Stoneward said, bursting into laughter despite himself. He had spoilt such dramatic scenes before merely because his sense of humour had run away with him – he kept thinking of funny details with which to adorn his theme. 'It's all true, Penelope! This wicked girl Jean is old enough to be Ni's mother. How do I know, you ask? Because she's *my* mother! She sure gets around! – But this time she's got a square.'

He rolled into the chair, laughing. Hell, what did it matter how you played your hand when you knew you couldn't put a foot wrong? That's what is known as a hand-to-foot existence. It didn't matter if this chick believed him or not – he had Congress backing. And a free chuckle.

Penelope had moved out with those nicely hinged knees to the call booth in the hall. She dialled angrily and spoke to someone. Sobering, Stoneward sat up and listened. He guessed she was calling Johnny Flower, wanting to know if hubby was under control at the all-N-Compassing office. This was rich! By the shattered look on her face when she returned, slowly, lowly, he knew that he had guessed rightly and Johnny had passed on his little tittle-tattle.

'I'm truly sorry, Mrs. Alexander,' he said, returning to seriousness to hand out a really corny line. 'It isn't that he doesn't love you any more, it's just that he fell into temptation. His spirit was willing and his flesh was weak. Try to take it bravely. I don't think he'll ever come back to you, but you can always find another man, you know. You're man-shaped!'

'I don't believe you,' she said and burst into tears. With a gallant effort, she tried to check herself but failed; she settled herself in a chair to cry more comfortably. Stoneward went across to her on hands and knees, like a pious panther. When he smoothed her hair, she flicked her head away, continuing to cry.

'You shouldn't cry,' he said. 'Alex was always unfair to you. He left you here shut away. He kept secrets from you. He kept

money from you. He never told you about me. . . . I can't bear to hear you cry. It sounds like termites in a tin beam.'

He put his arms round her, cuddling her. In a minute, he was kissing her, her grief and his greed all mixed together in a bowl of tears.

'Leave me alone,' she said. 'Who are you? Why did you come and tell me this?'

'I thought I'd made that clear, Penelope. Ni told me to come and tell you. He's bored to death and he's quitting - going to start life anew, a-nude.'

Though she had been crying, she had not really believed till now. Something Stoneward said seemed to have penetrated and made her accept the situation as he presented it.

'I can't believe it,' she said, which is what all women say when they first begin to believe.

Stoneward neither contradicted nor accepted her statement. He just crouched by her, naked under his clothes.

'Whatever am I going to do?' Penelope asked aloud at last, speaking not to him but to herself.

'I love you,' he said simply. 'I always have. Every word your husband has told me about you has been music to my ears. I've treasured the smallest fact about you, Penelope. I know your vital measurements, the size of stocking you take, the make of soap you use, which breakfast cereal you prefer, the names of your favourite movie and phoney stars, how long you like to sleep nights. . . . Unless you have secrets from Ni, I know everything about you, for you as a Normal are only the sum of these petty facts. Come with me to my flat, I'll take care of you - worshipping from afar all the time, have no fear! My research days for my magnum opus are over!'

She looked at him doubtfully.

'You know what,' she said. 'I think that right now I want to get away out of here. I can't think here at all. Will you kindly wait five minutes while I just go pack a bag, Mr. Stoneward? Then I'll be with you.'

'Your eyes have spent their days drifting among the starry nights,' he said dreamily.

Penelope laughed, got up a little jerkily and left the room. Paul Stoneward buried his face in the warm patch she had created in the chair, drumming his fists on the chair arm. People were all

the same, all the same, even this golden girl, just a puppet . . . all pulp puppets. He nursed his terrible secret: once people ceased to have any power over you, they were absolutely in your power. He could almost have cried about it.

He rose, walked quietly into the hall and dialled Civilian Sanctions again. When he had given Beynon his orders, he returned to the living room to await Penelope. She appeared after a quarter of an hour, entirely composed, clutching a tan suitcase a little too tightly. Stoneward took her arm and led her out of the house, mincing exaggeratedly by her soft side.

As they walked down the drive, he looked back over his shoulder. Brick house with pink and pistachio trim, lawn with pink roses florabounding all over the place in each corner, mail box on its white post at the foot of the driveway down the slope. Stoneward laughed. This popsie was really leaving home.

'Coffee?' she said suspiciously. 'What's that?'

'When you've done pacing up and down, it's an old time euphoric with taste additives,' Stoneward said, setting the cups down and widening his nostrils over the steam. It was exhilarating to have the three-dimensional shape of her in his room.

He had rolled Nigel Hamilton Alexander, snores and all, under his bed, and stuffed a sponge into his mouth. He had chased round, half serious, half-laughing, straightening out the room after he had let her in. Penelope hardly noticed him; she walked up and down the room like a little caged - well, a little caged cutie. You could see the exercise doing her ankles good; they looked fine. Not so her soul. Penelope was still in a state of shock. No resilience, these Normals - except physically, of course, in the case of present company.

Present company drank down her java like a good girl and heeled over on to the rug. Stoneward, who had been watching like a lynx, caught her as she fell, thought several thoughts, licked his lips, but straightened up and let her sleep.

Business first. Congress should have of his best.

Hustling into the bedroom, legs moving like dapper nutcrackers, head cool as a safe, he pulled several stage properties out of a drawer and flung them on to the bed, ruffling the covers as he did so. Then he seized the mortal remains of N-Compass Co.'s chief and rattled them roughly back to life.

'Penelope . . . stop . . . lemme get to the . . . ugh . . .' Alexander muttered, chewing his way through a king-size mist.

'Don't give me that crud about Penelope after what you've been doing to Jean,' Stoneward said nastily. 'Look at the mess the pair of you have made of my bedroom, you dirty old romp. Get up and get out.'

Heavily, Alexander pulled himself to the bedside and sat on it. His dull eye, moving like a whale in heavy seas, finally lighted on a female garment by the pillows.

'Jean left you that pair with her love,' Stoneward said. 'Said to tell you she had another pair some place. Now come on, snap out of it, Nigel.'

The older man buried his head in his hands. After some minutes of silent battle, he launched himself to his feet, exclaiming, 'I got to get back home and sort all this out with Penelope.'

'Home! Penelope!' Stoneward echoed. 'Don't be immoral, old sport. You can't have it both ways. The past has ceased to exist for you. You were a Normal, now you're not. Normals don't behave like you have; your card will have to be stamped "Neurotic" now!'

'You're just confusing me, mister,' Alexander said stubbornly. 'I got to get home.'

'That's what I'm telling you, Alexander the Grunt. You've got no home. You've stepped outside the bounds of normal behaviour and so your Normal life has ceased to exist. Face up to it like a man.'

'I got to get home. That's all I know.'

'Don't you love me any more, Ni?' Stoneward asked, peeping at his watch. 'We used to be such buddies in the old days. Remember the Farellis, the Vestersons, the vacations in Florida? Remember the pistachio shoots off Key West?'

'Ah, shut up, you give me bellyache,' Alexander said, 'not that I wish to be insulting and I'd like to make it clear I regret it if I have committed a nuisance on your premises.'

'Spoken like a man!' Stoneward cried delightedly. 'That's what I call breeding, pal. It's all you have left, believe me.'

'Just help me get a taxi, will you?'

They went down on to the street, quiet, well-manicured street full of ditto people. A cab pulled up for them. Paul Stoneward

bundled in after his victim, who did not protest beyond a grunt. He glanced at his watch again; but his timing had always been faultless and he could have patted himself with approval.

'2011, Springfield,' Alexander said to the driver.

The drive took them fifteen minutes. The cabby pulled up uncertainly by a big advertisement hoarding. Stoneward dragged his companion on to the sidewalk, crammed money into the driver's hand and said, 'Beat it, bud.'

He stood there, hands on hips, posing for his own pleasure and whistling the opening theme of Borodin's Second Symphony, while Alexander moved unhappily back and forth, a bull bereft of its favourite china shop. Before them loomed a big hoarding boosting Fawdree's Fadeless Fabrics.

'It's gone! My house - my home has gone!'

'Don't say I didn't warn you,' Stoneward said.

Crying as if in physical pain, Alexander ran behind the hoarding. Nothing there - just a flat lot with a little dust still hanging above it. (The Civic Demolition boys must have worked their disintegrators with real zest!) Alexander burst into howls of anguish.

'You're having a wail of a time, Alec Sander,' Stoneward said, taking the other by the arm. 'Now why don't you listen to me, your uncle P.? You're at last - although a solid forty-five - getting a glimmer of what life is about. You're learning, man! Life is not a substantial thing; you can't guarantee any one minute of it, past, present or future; you can't salt it away in moth-balls. You thought it was secure, safe, snug, something as solid and predictable as the foot in your boot, didn't you? You were wrong by at least one hundred and eighty degrees. Life is a dream, a dew. Fickle, coy and hard to please, prone to moth. Nothing is left to you now, man, but dreams. You never had a dream in your life. Now you have actively to start dreaming. Now - at last!'

'Penelope,' Alexander said. He pronounced the single word, then he took out his silk handkerchief and blew one forlorn and faded chord on his nose. The breeze turned over a page of his hair and he said, 'Penelope, you don't understand. . . . Penelope, I can't live without her, mister. We . . . shared everything. I can't explain. We shared . . . had secrets.'

'You had secrets?' Stoneward whispered, leaning forward.

'Now you're really giving, man. Let me among the interstices of your ego, if you'll pardon the dirty word, and I'll see if I can help at all.'

'There was one secret,' the middle-aged man said, weeping without restraint now as he talked, 'one secret that was very dear to us. I suppose everyone must have something. You have such a sharp way of being sympathetic, Paul, I can't be sure if you'll understand. . . . Remember how I was trying to dodge away from Johnny J. Flower in the bar whenever it was? This morning. I like him. I like Johnny. It wasn't that I didn't like him; and he likes me - you could see that. I wanted it to stay that way. I *want* him to like me. I don't know if you'll understand. . . . You see, I didn't want Johnny to find out what a bore I am. I always dodge him if I can. People bore me - except you, Paul, you're my only friend. I don't mind being bored; it's well, kind of comfortable - you know you're safe when you're bored. But I know I am boring, too, and that's the secret Penelope and me had. . . . I never wanted Johnny to find out. *She* knew I knew I was a bore and she - well, she just understood, that's all. I'll never find anyone like her again and now she's gone. Gone, man.'

Paul Stoneward did not even laugh. He had seen right down into the depths which had hitherto been closed to him, and he was frightened. Without another word, he turned away, walking off with hunched shoulders past the boarding, down the road, leaving Alexander crying on an empty lot.

By the time he got home, his high spirits had returned. He rang Beynon again.

'Your hair looks heliotrope on this screen, Commissioner,' he said, 'or did you dye it? Either way, I like it how you have it.' And he launched into a long and unwise cracking account of what he had done and was going to do on the Alexander case.

Beynon sighed heavily when the screen finally dimmed, and turned to me. He looked not unlike Alexander, heavy, solid, without dreams.

'Well, Kelly, do you feel the same as I do?' he asked. Commissioner Beynon always lead with a query.

I nodded. 'Paul's way of handling things is all wrong,' I said. 'It's not only a question of whether neurotics are born not made - Stoneward produces crazy, mixed-up people efficiently

enough, but they all have vacuums inside them by the time he's through, they can't create after he has been at them. The reason's simply that he himself has a vacuum inside. Underneath, he knows it, too; of that I'm certain.'

'Do we let him carry on?'

That's the godawful curse with Normals; I know well enough how Paul Stoneward feels about them. Even a man like Beynon, lousy with authority, passes the buck whenever he can. Basic lack of imagination, I suppose.

'I know I have the same stamp on my folder as he does,' I said, 'and that should make me on his side. But Paul's just out there doing mischief from which no good can come. Let me get on to Senator Willcroft at Peace Department.'

'You can't worry him!' Beynon said in alarm.

'Can't I? Sit back and watch me, Beynon. Willcroft's in charge of this project and I'm going to have it out with him straight. I want to save that girl if there's still time.'

It was dark when Stoneward got Penelope to the lot. The afternoon's infant breeze had become a wind with a will of its own. Alexander had trundled off, maybe to the nearest river. Callously Paul loaned the girl a torch, watching the erratic beam of it hunt for lawn and ramblers and verandah and brick with pink and pistachio trim. When she fell on to nyloned knees, head drooping, he went over, squatting on his haunches by her.

Penelope had found a dahlia. It must have been one of the bunch she was tending before Stoneward appeared; the disintegrators had missed it. She clutched it, her eyes bowl-full of tears. Almost it seemed as if the flower brought her understanding.

'Whatever you are, you are wicked,' she said unsteadily. 'You have done *all* - all this. . . . I don't know why or how. . . . You must be the devil.'

'The devil was a bore without a sense of humour; I'm not flattered,' Stoneward said.

She brought her hand, that pebble-smooth hand, up and smote him over his handsome mouth.

'Why?' she said, her voice rising unmanageably, 'just tell me *why*, for pity's sake, have you done this to us?'

'I love you, so I will tell you,' he said, calmed by the hurt of

her hand. 'I work for civilization. I love civilization more than any blank and pretty-faced mediocrity in the world. Unfortunately civilization has got stuck right in a rut. When sociology really got itself established as a science at the end of last century, formulae were developed which enabled everyone to fit exactly into his or her social niche; maybe you've heard? And for anyone with any little residual twinges of emotion, a wide range of drugs was made tastily available. The end result was the complete - well, almost complete - banishment of mental upset from the world. Unprecedented calm and content settled like fog, and this is me lamenting it. Three boozy boos for the Age of Content.'

They squatted together facing each other, the fallen torch casting shadows upward over their figures. Penelope still clutched the dahlia but had forgotten it. In the blind-blowing dark, they had lost their identities. They might have been things on Easter Island.

'Civilization is dying day by day, because the people who made it and continued it have gone,' Stoneward said, speaking naturally now he was saying something he believed. 'Everything we value was produced by malcontents or psychotics - men who could not shape themselves to the world as it was, and tried to reshape it to fit them. Our first ancestor who came down out of a tree only did it because the trees weren't good enough for him. The guy who invented the wheel was just too goddamned cussed to lend a hand with the sledge like the rest. The guy who first kindled fire only did it to prove to himself that he was a cut above the other jerks. So it's been all along. Your inventor, your artist - he's got something to work out. But now, *now* no one has a thing to work out!'

'Except you,' Penelope said.

Stoneward rested his fingers on her knees, playing a small, silent tune there.

'I'm the one in a million who still has a chip on his shoulder; no society is absolutely perfect, thank God!' he said. 'Yes, Penny, Pennyworth, Penelope, my darling Pente Loop, I am the Joker in the pack. The few neurotics left in the country are now all Government employed, trying to cope with the dangers of stagnation. We act as random factors, jerking dull citizens here and there into awareness. You Normals live in life as if it were a

house: it's not, it's a tiger ride. I've sold Congress my own way of waking people – at least for a trial period. It's violent but it's effective; I reckon you'll admit that, Penelope. You'll never be the same girl again, will you, eh?

She did not answer, just looked at him as if he had melted.

'Reckon old Cornbags Alexander has blo-o-own away to limbo,' Stoneward sighed. 'You'll have to grow some real dreams now, little girl, now you see what a false dream security was. . . .'

'So you even have an intellectual front to cover all you've done,' she exclaimed slowly. 'You wanted to see into me, not realizing how reciprocal the process was – and consequently I've seen into you. You're – you're just miserably unhappy, Paul. You boost yourself up as a joker, but you're not. You're not even the knave. You're just the extra, faceless card that sometimes gets stuck into a new deck. You're – even with Congress behind you! – you're nothing, you can *be* nothing. . . .'

He had put his sharp elbows on his thighs and rested his chin in his hands as if he was listening his ears off. Instead, he was crying his eyes out. The little crystals elongated and flashed down to the torchlight.

'Paul,' she said sharply.

Paul Stoneward could not cry at all elegantly. He needed practice, that guy.

'I just. . . . I can't go any further,' he said brokenly. 'Penny, you got to help pick me up.'

It was about then I came round the corner of Fawdree's Fadeless Fabrics with the gun in my hand, out of breath and angry, but so happy to have made Senator Willcroft see things my way. Strange to reflect how that first view of my future wife should be of her with her arms round the man I killed.

Even the hunters are hunted: in this or any other rotten age.

A number of famous horror stories have worked on the notion of evil manifesting itself in the young. Henry James' tour de force, 'The Turn of the Screw', is the best and most famous example of this, and in my previous anthology, 'The Mind at Bay', I selected Jane Rice's magnificent 'Idol of the Flies', which concerned a child so evil that he invokes the personal and quite damning attention of Satan himself. When children step into that gloomy territory where reality and unreality merge, the chill of fear has a special potency, and for this book I have chosen two specific stories in which young people are the principal characters. The first, 'The Playfellow' by Lady Cynthia Asquith, deals with an invisible companion – the kind that so many lonely children seem to adopt and which most parents learn to tolerate around the house. But how real might such playmates be? If they exist only in the mind of the child, does this lessen their reality or their power in any significant way? This is a memorable short story, rich in atmosphere and carrying with it images which linger in the best tradition of horror fiction.

The Playfellow

by Lady Cynthia Asquith

Laura Halyard wondered whether she would ever grow more accustomed to the loveliness of her new home. Each time she looked at the beautiful Tudor house she still wanted to rub her eyes.

After the din and glare of New York, the mellow beauty and green silence of Lichen Hall and its perfect surroundings lay like a spell on its new mistress. It was just six months since her husband Claud Halyard had succeeded to the property at the death of his elder brother, who had died childless. Since his marriage to Laura business had kept Claud in America, so she never met her unfortunate brother-in-law. Yet she often thought of him, so strongly had his sad story impressed her imagination; the early loss of his adored wife, the accident which left him a hopeless cripple, and the ghastly tragedy of his only child, a girl

of ten, who had perished in the fire which twelve years ago had destroyed a small wing of Lichen Hall.

The building had been so skilfully restored that it was difficult to believe in that fatal fire. Laura felt herself lapped in an atmosphere of peace, and found it impossible to associate anything so hideous as the death of that poor child with this place. Could such a thing have happened here, and only twelve years ago? In these serene surroundings it seemed so unimaginable.

Laura Halyard had the extraordinary adaptability of her race, and as she sat in the great hall one December evening, her slim, delicate beauty glowing in the flicker of the firelight, she looked wonderfully in tone with her setting. She was giving tea to the old parson, whose faded eyes blinked appreciatively at the grace and beauty of his hostess. He wished he didn't feel it was time to end his visit.

'If I may be permitted to say so,' he said, reluctantly dragging his stiff limbs from the depths of the easy-chair, 'if I may say so, Lady Halyard, it is very pleasant to have a *châtelaine* here again. Lichen Hall has been a sad place these last twelve years.'

'Yes,' responded Laura sympathetically. 'I don't suppose my poor brother-in-law ever recovered from the terrible tragedy of that poor, poor child.'

'A broken man is a phrase one often hears,' said the parson, 'but I am thankful to say that in the course of a long life it has only been my lot to know one man to whom I felt the phrase could be justly applied. That man was your brother-in-law. He did his duty by this place. No one could have done it better. But after Daphne's death, duty was all the world ever held for him. Nothing else remained. To see such grey ashes and have no power to kindle one spark has been a great pain to me. Such loneliness! Scarcely anyone ever came here during these last years. Just a few old friends, but I always felt he only suffered them out of consideration for *their* feelings.'

'I often wondered why your husband never came. In spite of the twenty years between them, they had always appeared to be such devoted brothers. It seems strange he should never once have returned to his own home until he succeeded to it.'

'I know,' said Laura. 'Of course he was very tied by business, but still he could have managed it in his summer holiday. I often

urged it, but he always said he thought next year would be better. I don't know why it was. Of course, Mr. Cloud, he's very sensitive. He shrinks from things. Perhaps – I sometimes think – he felt he simply couldn't face his brother's misery.'

'Possibly,' said the parson. 'But I wish he had come. It might have made a big difference.'

Laura detected a hint of reproach in the kind old voice.

'It isn't that he doesn't love this place,' she eagerly assured him. 'I can't tell you how much it means to him.'

'I know, Lady Halyard, I know. You see, I remember him as a boy. Why, his love for his home was quite a household joke. Once he gave a visiting schoolfellow a black eye because he dared to say his home was more beautiful than this! Bright days those were, when he and all his sisters were young.' The parson's pale eyes widened as he stared wistfully back into the past. 'I always think this garden clamours for children. It's wasted when there's none about. I assure you, it's a real joy to see your little girl tearing up and down the grass slopes.'

'I can't tell you how happy Hyacinth is here,' exclaimed Laura. 'Her day is one long rapture.'

'Bless her!' said the parson. 'How lovely she is and how extraordinarily like—'

'Like? Like whom?'

'Like her poor cousin – like poor little Daphne. Why, surely the resemblance must have struck your husband?'

'No. At least he hasn't said anything, but then perhaps he wouldn't. Even after all these years he can't bear to speak of his niece. He never mentions Daphne's name.'

'I know it was a great shock to him,' agreed the parson. 'He was fond of her. I remember he was always playing with her. But then we all loved her. Yes, there was a real fascination about little Daphne.'

'And was she really like our Hyacinth?'

'Like?' exclaimed the parson. 'Why, it's the most astounding resemblance! I assure you it gave me quite a start the first time I saw your girl peering at me through the bushes. Yes, it took me back twelve years. She's ten, isn't she – your Hyacinth?'

Laura nodded.

'Well, you see, poor Daphne was just the same age the last time I saw her – the day before. Yes, yes, I can see her now. Just the

same mop of red-gold hair framing the pale, pointed face – the wide eyes and the same eager look – something so extraordinarily *vivid*.'

'Really,' said Laura. Her voice trembled and the hall swam in a blur of tears.

'Yes, a most extraordinary resemblance,' continued the old man. 'Voices a good deal alike, too. And your Hyacinth seems to have a similar passion for play. I never saw any being like Daphne for filling the day. She always seemed to want to cram as much fun into each hour as it could possibly hold. It was almost as though she knew she had no time to lose. Do you remember that passage in Maeterlinck about those he calls "Les Avertis"?''

'Yes, I do,' Laura's voice was heavy.

'Well, well, I must be going now,' said the old man. 'Thanks, dear lady, for a very pleasant afternoon. Give my love to Daph – Hyacinth. She must come to tea with me.'

'Good night, Mr. Cloud. Come again soon,' said Laura rather mechanically. Turning to the fire she kicked one of the large logs with her foot, and then stirred amongst the embers with a poker until they blazed into flames. She felt cold and tired. She started when the clergyman re-entered the room. He apologized for having forgotten his gloves.

'Oh, what colour are they?' asked Laura absently, as though a variegated assortment of gloves were likely to be lying about the hall.

'Grey. Here they are. I'm so sorry to have troubled you.'

'Stop one moment, Mr. Cloud. There was something I meant to ask you. How do you think my husband is looking?'

'I think he looks well, Lady Halyard, quite well. He always was a magnificent fellow. Yes, I think he looks quite well. But, since you ask me, the only thing I notice about him is a sort of strained expression on his face – in his eyes, and on his forehead. It's as though he were making some kind of mental effort – as if he were trying to remember something.'

'Trying to remember something?'

'Yes, he looks as I feel I must look when I'm struggling with my daily crossword. No doubt it's the result of all his work in that office. I'm so glad to see him out of it. Somehow I can't picture any Halyard in an office. Oh yes, Claud was always made for country life. Good night, Lady Halyard, good night.'

Left to herself, Laura crouched over the blazing fire. 'Claud made for country life?' Yes, so she had always thought. In America he had seemed an exile pining for his native land. And yet, now that they were at his beloved home, and it had proved more beautiful than even his rhapsodies had led her to expect, what was the matter? To her growing disappointment she could not help admitting that her husband's spirits -- never steady -- were on the whole much lower than they used to be. A sultry gloom seemed settling on him. Then that look of strain the parson had noticed. Others had commented on this. What could cause it, now that the present and the future seemed so fair? Business worries? Laura wondered almost hopefully. No, what business worries could he have? He told her everything. Told her everything, did he? Laura almost laughed aloud. That very afternoon she had re-encountered that threadbare phrase. The heroine of the bad novel she had been reading, a woman in total darkness concerning her husband, had confidently asserted, 'He tells me everything!' How could any human being ever tell anyone *everything*?

No doubt Claud had got something on his mind. Since their home-coming, she had been conscious of a barrier between them. In old days, if challenged, he would often admit to a fit of depression. Now he seemed rather to resent any inquiry as to his health or spirits. If she said, 'Is anything the matter?' he would answer almost irritably, 'The matter? No. nothing's the matter. Don't suggest things.'

Laura was not left to her reflections for long. Her husband, a tall, handsome man, came into the room with their daughter Hyacinth riding on his shoulders, her mop of red-gold hair shining above his dark head.

The three of them settled round the fire. Hyacinth, with her knees drawn up to her pointed chin, and her wide eyes staring into the flames, made but a poor pretence of listening to her father reading *Ivanhoe* for her benefit. The moment the chapter was finished she sprang on to the tips of her toes and stood quivering, like a flame released.

'May I go now?' her whole eager being seemed to express.

Struck afresh by the gleaming quality of her beauty, her father gazed at her lovingly. So breathlessly full of life! Ought she perhaps to have playfellows of her own age?

'Are you lonely, Sprite?' he asked her tenderly.

'Lonely! Oh no! I'm never, never lonely here!' There was a note of exultation in the child's happy laugh.

'I must go now!' she said excitedly, and, slipping out of her father's arms, she darted up the dark oak stairs and, with a wave of her hand, disappeared from her parents' gaze. Long after she had turned the corner that took her out of sight, they heard her running footsteps and her voice trilling out 'Come, Lasses and Lads, Take Leave of your Dads'.

'Hyacinth's voice matches her face so marvellously, doesn't it, Claud?' said Laura. 'Not many people's do. Hers has that piercing quality of crystal youth. It's like cold, cold water or biting into an apple.'

Claud rose to throw another log on to the blazing fire.

'Laura, what does Hyacinth mean by saying she's never lonely here?'

'I don't know, Claud. But, now you ask, haven't you noticed how different she is since we came here? Do you remember how listless she sometimes used to seem? I often got quite worried, and thought that perhaps I ought to borrow some bright child to keep her company. But now she's always as happy as the day is long. In fact - to tell the honest truth - I can't help rather missing her moods - or at least her dependence on me. You see, she used so to want me. Don't you remember how she was always imploring me to read to her or tell her stories?'

'Doesn't she now?' asked Claud.

'No; nowadays I can scarcely ever persuade her to stay with me. She's always rushing away, as though she had something better to do. It's little I see of her beyond her heels and the back of her head! She's so strangely self-sufficient. Between you and me, Claud, I think she's almost disquietingly happy.'

'Disquietingly happy? What do you mean, Laura?'

'Well - I mean - it's almost uncanny. Really, I don't know how to put it into words, but it's - it's as though she had some resource we don't know about. She seems so *occupied*. Yes, that's it - occupied. It sounds too silly, but it's as though being by herself were not being alone. She's grown a queer new sort of smile lately, too, a stealthy, sidelong smile, and the comings and goings of that smile don't have any connection with what any of us say or do. Haven't you noticed it? Claud, do you remember

what that spooky friend of mine said about Hyacinth?’

‘No, I don’t,’ Claud answered shortly. ‘Some absurdity, I’m sure, from what I remember of her.’

‘She said, “Now there’s a child that should *see* things. Her ‘muddy vesture of decay’ is too transparent to ‘close her in’.” She said she had what she called “listening eyes”, and the thinnest lids she had ever seen. Nonsense I thought it at the time, but now, Claud, I sometimes wonder . . . This old place—’

‘Oh, Lord! For Heaven’s sake don’t start any of that psychical rot here.’

Surprised at the annoyance in her husband’s voice, Laura laughed.

‘I know, dear, you think no American can come near a stately home of England without peopling it with ghosts, but I assure you I haven’t – to relapse into my native tongue – “sensed” anything unpleasant here. I’ve had neither sight nor sound of abbots carrying their heads, nor of ladies in blood-speckled shrouds. No, indeed! On the contrary, I am conscious of a something that’s happy – gay – blithe – I don’t know what to call it, but there seems a sort of *liveliness* about the atmosphere of this house – especially upstairs, and most especially in that room Hyacinth insisted on having as her playroom, the old day-nursery.’

‘I didn’t want her to use that room,’ said Claud gruffly.

‘I know, dear, I know,’ his wife responded sympathetically. ‘But she *insisted*.’

Poor fellow, she thought, how sensitive he is! Of course it had been his little niece Daphne’s playroom. Probably she had romped in it just before her life ended so tragically. Laura reproached herself. She should never have allowed Hyacinth to appropriate that particular room. For Claud, its associations with Daphne were too strong. She should have remembered how he winced at any reminder of that poor dead child. Laura shuddered at the thought of the horror of her death. Ten years old! Just the same age as Hyacinth!

‘I promise you there’s nothing unpleasant in that room,’ Laura went on. ‘But – please don’t think me silly – I do feel an atmosphere in it – a happy, youthful one. When I sit in that room, as I often do, memories of my own childhood break out of the past and come thronging round me. I feel the years simply slipping

off me.' She laughed. 'Why, I get funny impulses to play, to dance, to jump about. My toes begin to twiddle. It's as though there were some *invitation* in the room. You'll think me too absurd, but once I actually found myself hiding in the cupboard, just as though I expected someone to come and search for me. And yet all the time I knew Hyacinth must be in bed and asleep. Sometimes I long to mount the old rocking-horse and have a gallop. I would, too, only I'm so afraid of being caught by one of those terribly grown-up housemaids.

'Once I thought I heard light, scuffling steps and a sort of soft tittering. Imagination, of course! . . . And yet, I suppose generations and generations of children have played in that room?'

'Yes,' said Claud. His voice was very gruff, and as he spoke he raised *The Times* and held it, like a wall, between him and any further confidences. Conscious of having annoyed him, Laura went away to tell Hyacinth it was bedtime. It was half an hour before she found her in the hayloft, and then she had great difficulty in coaxing her indoors. At last she handed her over to her maid, Bessy. The moment she returned to the hall her husband rose, saying he would go and say good night to Hyacinth.

'You won't find that little flibberty-gibbet in bed. I had such a tussle to get her in. It's the same thing every night. However late I leave her, she always says, "I haven't had nearly time enough to play!"'

'Not nearly time enough to play?' echoed Claud. '*She* doesn't say that; not Hyacinth?'

'Yes, why shouldn't she?' exclaimed Laura, puzzled by the violence of his manner.

But, giving no answer, Claud hastened from the room. That night at dinner, when Laura asked him why he had been so struck by those very ordinary words of Hyacinth's that she had repeated, he said he had no idea to what she was alluding, couldn't remember her quoting Hyacinth, and that it must be one of her 'silly fancies'.

Puzzled and hurt, Laura dropped the subject. Claud did not look well, and tonight that expression of strain was very noticeable. How had the old parson described it? As though he were trying to remember something? No, she didn't think that was what the expression in Claud's cavernous grey eyes suggested.

But when she tried to define it to herself, she felt completely baffled.

A few days later, the Halyards were walking in the garden. A strong wind blew, the trees were bare, and crisp leaves, the colour of Hyacinth's hair, rustled around their feet. As usual their thoughts turned on their adored child.

'I thought Hyacinth looked very pale at luncheon,' said Claud.

'Yes,' answered his wife. 'Naughty child, she went out of doors last night!'

'Out of doors?'

'Yes. Bessy found her shoes and stockings drenched this morning, and when I asked, the little wretch owned she had gone out long after we were in bed. Just think how cold it must have been! She wouldn't tell me why she had done it, and when I said she must promise not to do it again, she burst into tears.'

'Little sprite!' laughed Claud. 'She still thinks of sleep as waste of time! I hope it may be – heavens! Just look at her now! What is she doing? I never saw a child run so fast, all alone.'

Hyacinth, her face wildly tense, flashed past them on long, spindly legs. Her speed, surprising for her age, never slackened until, with arms outstretched to touch it, she reached an acacia tree, at the foot of which, panting and laughing, she flung herself to the ground.

Her parents approached.

'Well done, Hyacinth! You *were* going fast!'

'I nearly won that time!' exclaimed the excited child, her green eyes blazing. 'Oh, so, so nearly!'

'You nearly *won*? What do you mean, by you "nearly won"? Were you racing one leg against the other?'

Hyacinth flushed, smiled nervously, sprang to her feet and in an instant had run out of sight behind the great yew hedge.

'Funny child!' said her mother, with an uneasy laugh. 'She's always running off, just as though she had an appointment elsewhere. She never seems to need me now. Do you remember how she used to think it such a treat to sleep with me? Now she never wants to. You know, Claud, it sounds ridiculous, but nowadays, when I go into that child's room, I feel as if I were – inter-

rupting.' As she spoke, Laura gave a slight shiver. Her own words seemed to crystallize vague misgivings of which she had scarcely been aware.

'Interrupting?' echoed Claud. 'Interrupting what?'

'I don't know,' she answered hopelessly, and turned towards the house.

Claud whistled for his dogs and set off for a long walk.

That evening Laura went to see Hyacinth in bed.

'Darling,' she said wheedlingly, 'wouldn't you like to come and sleep with Mummie tonight? We'll have early morning tea together and play ludo on my big pillow.'

An anxious look flitted across the child's sweet but rather set face.

'Thank you, Mummie darling,' she answered shyly but decidedly, 'only I'm so happy in my own lovely room. I love it, and I don't think it would like to be left.'

Intense relief shone in her bright eyes when, in silent acquiescence, her mother kissed her good night.

'Good Mummie,' she cooed, and, with a little ecstatic wriggle, she turned her radiant face towards the window.

That night it was very late before Laura rejoined her husband after dinner. The great bow window in the hall was uncurtained and the moonlight streamed in, its slanting green shafts mingling with the flickering red from the blazing fire by which Claud sat, an unopened book on his knee.

'Where have you been all this time, Laura?' he asked, glancing up at her face. 'What have you been doing? I hope Hyacinth hasn't been up to any more of her pranks.'

'No,' Laura answered quickly. 'But I have.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, I've been what you'd call silly. You remember what I told you about those funny feelings I get in the playroom? Well, directly after I left you over your coffee, I felt I wanted to go to the playroom. Don't frown, Claud, I couldn't help it. I simply *had* to go. My feet just took me there. Well, as I went along the passage, I heard a faint noise – a queer sort of a rushing noise. I opened the door. What do you think I saw? Claud, the rocking-horse was plunging to and fro – going furiously – *without a rider!*'

'Well,' said Claud, 'no doubt Hyacinth heard you coming, and, knowing she should be in bed, jumped off and ran out of the other door.'

'So I thought – so I hoped! But I rushed straight to her room, and found her fast asleep.'

'Well, then it must have been one of the maids.'

'No, there was no one about. They were all down at their supper. When I got back to the playroom, the rocking-horse was gradually subsiding. I watched it; and soon it was quite motionless.'

'No! You *do* surprise me!' jeered Claud.

'The queer thing,' said Laura solemnly, 'was that even while the rocking-horse was galloping so fast, the stirrups were not swaying as they naturally would. No, they were quite taut – stretched out forwards – just as if—'

'Look here!' exclaimed Claud angrily. 'What are you driving at? What have you been reading? What have you been eating? Rocking-horse, indeed! It sounds more like a nightmare! I never knew Hyacinth had a rocking-horse. Who gave it to her?'

'No one. We found it here. It was Daphne's. You must have seen it. Vermilion nostrils and minus a tail. But, do you mean to say – haven't you ever been in the playroom since you came home?'

'No.'

'How extraordinary!'

'Why should I?' Claud's voice was fierce and he glared at his wife.

'Quite, quite!' said Laura nervously. She was surprised and shocked at the tone of his voice and the expression on his face. Why, for a second he had looked at her as though he hated her. Was it possible? Claud, her gentle, courteous husband, whose devotion to her was almost a joke to their friends. 'Oh, I've forgotten my spectacles,' she said confusedly, 'I'll run up and fetch them. I shan't be two minutes.'

With this excuse she ran upstairs, leaving her husband moodily staring at her spectacles, which lay, conspicuous, on the table where she had just placed them.

Five minutes later she returned. Glancing at her, Claud knew that if she had not been flushed she would have been very pale.

'What is it now?'

With her back to him, Laura stood facing the fire. She spoke quickly, in a very low voice, as though she feared to hear her own words.

'As I got near the playroom, I heard the gramophone playing. I thought I heard dancing feet, but when I opened the door there was no one in the room. You won't believe me, Claud, but there was no one in the room. No one! And yet a *record had just been set going*. It was "Boys and Girls come out to Play". Before I found the electric switch, I thought I felt something very light brush past me. Almost before I was aware of it, it had gone. Oh, so quickly – just like a puff of wind! To make sure, I went to all the maids' bedrooms. One of them might have started the gramophone, but they were all in bed. Then I went to Hyacinth's room. I crept in, so as not to wake her, if she was asleep, and she was – yes, sound asleep. But as I looked at her, I heard a tap-tap at the window. It *might* have been a branch. Anyhow, it woke her. She sprang up in a second wide, wide awake, with such a joyful welcoming expression on her excited little face. . . . Then she saw me, and she looked sort of scared and sorry – yes, *very* sorry to see me. Oh, Claude! I couldn't bear the look on her face when she saw me!'

Laura's last words came from her like a cry, and she turned to Claud with outstretched arms, as though appealing against she knew not what.

'Damnation!' he cried, springing to his feet. 'I can't stand any more of this! Look here, Laura darling, we'll all three go away tomorrow. It's obvious you need a change. We've been here too long. After all, you aren't used to staying like a tree in one place. Besides, it will be great fun to take Hyacinth to London, won't it? Laura, my sweet, darling Laura, say you like this plan!'

'Of course I should love it,' murmured Laura, clasped in his arms.

It was such joy to feel herself carried on this wave of tenderness back into the haven of love, in which, until recently, she had felt so secure, that any proposal would have seemed welcome.

If only he would go on looking at her as now, with love in his eyes, what matter where they went? And yet, even in the intensity of her relief, Laura was conscious of the irony of his wishing to leave the home he had always described as the Earthly Paradise.

It was decided that they should leave the very next day, but, alas, when tomorrow came, their plan could not be carried out. Hyacinth had sprained her ankle very badly and was unable to put her foot to the ground. When told the news, Laura hurried to her daughter's room. She found her sitting up in bed. Her face was flushed and she looked shy.

'Poor darling! This is too sad. However did it happen?'

'I'm so sorry, Mummie.' Hyacinth spoke hurriedly and nervously. 'But I'm afraid I've been naughty again. Don't be very angry with me, but I went out again last night and—'

'You went out? Oh, Hyacinth darling, you promised you wouldn't!'

'I'm so sorry, Mummie, but it was such a lovely night – such bright, bright moonlight. It made me forget I mustn't, and I simply *couldn't* say no.'

'The sooner you learn to say no to yourself the better. I shan't be able to trust you any more. You've hurt yourself, so I won't scold you, but you must never, never do such a thing again. Anyhow, what happened? How did you hurt your silly self?'

'I had a fall.'

'What, running?'

'No,' answered Hyacinth reluctantly. 'I was climbing a tree.'

'Climbing a tree? Good heavens! You might have broken your leg and lain out all night. Which tree?'

'The big elm. The one Daddie made a house in when he was little. A branch broke—'

'Well, you've had what Nannie used to call a "natural punishment". So I won't say any more. Lie still now, until the doctor comes.'

After the doctor had bound up Hyacinth's ankle, her mother went to look at the elm tree. She was appalled at the height of the broken branch. It seemed almost a miracle that the child was not more seriously hurt.

She returned to question her.

'You don't mean to tell me you fell from where a branch is broken off right up near the top of the tree?'

'Yes, but you see, there were so many branches that I paused on all the way down. I only really fell just the last bit.'

'But I had no idea you could climb so high. Surely you can't have got all that way up without any help?'

'Oh yes, I did!' cried Hyacinth, triumphantly. 'And she climbed even higher, but then, of course, her legs are a little longer.'

'She? Who is She?'

Hyacinth flushed scarlet, and in confusion flung her arms round her mother's neck. Glancing quickly all round the room, she put her finger in front of her mouth.

'Don't tell Daddie. Oh, Mummie, *please, please* don't tell!' she said in a scared, panting voice. Not one word more would she say. After that one unguarded moment, her whole being was clenched in silence. At first her mother tried to coax her into an explanation, but, alarmed by her flushed excited face, she took her temperature. Finding her a little feverish, she did not like to press her any further. She seemed so troubled.

Laura did not tell her husband of Hyacinth's strange slip.

'*She* climbed even higher'? How could she tell him of that? She dreaded to hear him speak in that new, sharp way, so utterly unlike his old self.

After all, Hyacinth's fall must have been a considerable shock. Perhaps she had not known what she was saying. The next day the child seemed better, and Laura made another attempt to cross-question her about her accident, but, at the first word of inquiry, the child's flower-like mouth set in a thin, hard line, and an expression came into her eyes that was like a shutter between her and her mother.

During the following days she was affectionate but somehow guarded, and Laura felt strangely out of touch with her. On everyone's account she longed for a change and chafed at the enforced postponement of their plans. Claud, though now uniformly gentle in his manner, seemed increasingly depressed. Laura was determined to leave the first possible day, but unfortunately Hyacinth's injury proved more serious than had been supposed, and her ankle took a long time to recover. No bed-ridden child had ever been so little trouble. In fact she seemed almost unnaturally contented. Whenever her mother read aloud to her, she was politely acquiescent, but her manner was that of one who makes a necessary concession and waits with as good a grace as can be commanded.

Her gladness when the book was closed was evident, and when her mother turned to leave the room she would wave her hand over-gratefully, and raise herself a little on her pillows, with a look of relief and a hovering smile of happy expectancy. Though Laura tried to shut her mind to the impression made by Hyacinth's manner, she could not succeed. Stung out of her usual self-control, she once cried out, 'What is it, Hyacinth? Why are you always waiting now – waiting for me to go?'

A look of fear quivered across the child's sensitive face.

'Waiting? What do you mean, Mummie? Why do you think I want you to go?' And with unskilled evasiveness she began to talk of irrelevancies – the cat's kittens, the new gardener, the pony that had kicked the groom – anything that came into her head.

With a heavy heart and a sense of absurdity, Laura acquiesced in making conversation with the child whose confidence she had once so completely possessed.

Though Hyacinth was full of strange whims, the one her mother thought the queerest was her insistence on having the rocking-horse brought into her bedroom.

'But, darling, it will take up so much room. And whatever is the use of having a rocking-horse you can't ride?'

But Hyacinth's pale, peaked face set in obstinacy.

'I want it. I need it,' was all she would say.

So the shabby old rocking-horse was dragged along the passage and stood in arrested prance at the foot of the child's bed.

That evening, as Laura came into the room, Hyacinth gave an obvious start, and, turning to her mother in flushed uneasiness, said querulously:

'Aren't I old enough yet, Mother, for people to knock at my door before they come into my room? You always tell me I must knock at your door.'

Amazed and hurt, Laura looked at the usually so gentle child, whose worried gaze she noticed was now fixed on the rocking-horse. Glancing at it herself, her glance became a stare. Was it her fancy, or was it slightly, almost imperceptibly moving?

'Have you been out of bed, Hyacinth?' she asked suspiciously.

'Oh no, Mummie, why?'

'Only I thought perhaps you had been very naughty and got

on the rocking-horse. When I came in I thought it was just moving, as if it had been in motion and wasn't yet quite still. But of course it must have been my fancy.'

With unwonted eagerness, Hyacinth said:

'Will you read to me now, Mummie?'

Laura readily consented.

'Before I begin, though,' she said, 'I must tell you some good news. The doctor says you may get up in a week, and the very day after you get up we are going to take you to London.'

'You're going to take me to London?' Hyacinth's voice was sharp with dismay.

'Yes, darling. Won't it be fun?'

To her distress, Hyacinth burst into tears.

'Oh no, Mummie! No, no, no! Please don't take me away from here. I can't go! I won't go! It wouldn't be fair!'

'What do you mean, you absurd child? You'll have a lovely time in London. We'll take you to the Zoo and Madame Tussaud's and have pink ices at Gunther's. We'll do all the treats I used to tell you about in New York.'

Hyacinth's eyes welled with tears.

'Oh, please, Mummie,' she implored, 'don't take me away from lovely here.'

'But, my darling. I love you to love this place, but you can't always be here. It will be all the more fun to come back to it.' She tried to laugh the child out of her distress. 'After all, you goose, it won't run away because we leave it. Everything will be exactly the same when we return.'

'I don't know, Mother,' sobbed Hyacinth. 'You can't tell. I'm afraid to go - besides, it wouldn't be fair.'

'Not fair, what do you mean?' questioned Laura, now completely bewildered.

'Oh! I don't know, Mummie! But I'm so happy here. Mayn't I stay? Please, please, please!'

Seeing Hyacinth so hysterically excited, Laura said firmly: 'We won't talk about it any more now,' and began to read aloud to unlistening ears.

The next day Hyacinth seemed much more sensible. Laura told her their departure was quite settled, and she made an obvious effort to accept the inevitable with as good a grace as possible, but she looked pale and strained and her manner was even more than usually preoccupied.

'She looks as though she were trying to propitiate herself,' Laura explained to her husband.

'Trying to propitiate herself? What an absurd phrase!' he laughed. 'The ideas you have about that child!'

'I haven't any ideas about her.' Laura was astonished at the vehemence of her own voice.

Laura spent most of Christmas Eve decorating a small tree for Hyacinth. When she brought it upstairs, gay with glittering tinsel, gilded walnuts and shiny ornaments, the child clapped her hands with delight. Saying she would return in about an hour to light the candles, Laura placed the tree on a table in front of the fire.

When she came back she was surprised to find the room illuminated by the glimmer of little wax candles. Hyacinth seemed asleep, but sat up as the door opened. Assuming the child had prevailed on Bessy the maid to light the candles, Laura merely said:

'Well, I must say, after all my trouble, I do think you might have waited for me. Never mind. Now let's pull the crackers together.'

Shamefacedly Hyacinth pointed to the coloured tatters of two dozen exploded crackers. Her bed was strewn with paper caps, mottoes, and little tin musical instruments.

'Sorry, Mummie, I just couldn't wait,' she mumbled. 'I *love* candles. Flames are such fun, aren't they? May I have some toy fireworks? Please, Mummie!'

'I don't know. I think they're rather dangerous.'

'Oh no, Mummie. They aren't! Please say I may have some. I know! I'll ask Daddie to give me some. He told me to tell him what I wanted.'

Laura went to find Bessy.

'You should have asked me before lighting the candles on the Christmas tree,' she said severely. 'It wasn't at all safe to leave Miss Hyacinth alone in the room with all those candles alight. They often set fire to a bit of the tree. There should always be someone at hand with a wet sponge. I'm surprised at you, Bessy.'

'I didn't never light no tree, my lady,' said the astonished maid. 'I haven't been into Miss Hyacinth's room, not for two hours.'

Laura hurried back to Hyacinth.

'I don't want to scold you on Christmas Eve, but it was very naughty of you to get out of bed to light the candles, when you know perfectly well you're still forbidden to put your foot to the ground. And isn't it rather selfish to pull crackers by yourself?'

Hyacinth blushed, but the expression on her face was unmistakably one of relief.

'Sorry, Mummie,' she said, 'so sorry', and impetuously she flung her arms around her mother's neck and kissed her quickly – lovingly – just as she used to in the days when she was lonely.

At last Hyacinth's ankle was sufficiently recovered to allow the Halyards to make all their plans for leaving the next day. That evening Claud was to dine out with an old school-fellow who lived about four miles away. Before starting he went up to say good night to Hyacinth. Her half-packed trunk was open, and she was practising getting about the room.

'Don't ruin my tie! he cried, as, hopping towards him, she flung her thin arms around his neck.

'Bother your tie!' she laughed. 'Oh, Daddie, darling Daddie. Thank you for the lovely, lovely box of fireworks. They came by the afternoon post. Aren't they gorgeous? Look at the lovely pictures on the lid. Whizz-bangs, catherine wheels and all!'

'Oh, they've come, have they? Well, mind, you aren't on any account to touch them. I'll let them off for you the first evening we come home. I'll carry them away now and lock them up somewhere safe.'

'Oh, mayn't they stay here, Daddie? I like looking at the pictures.'

'Certainly not. I can't trust you not to touch them.'

Hyacinth stood flushed and pouting. Suddenly she turned towards the window.

'Oh, look, Daddie,' she cried, pointing. 'Look at that great white owl. Oh, what a lovely Mrs. Fly-by-Night!'

'Where, Hyacinth? I can't see it.'

'No Daddie. You aren't looking where I'm pointing; can't you see? She's just flown over the church tower.'

But look where he might, Claud could see no owl. He was still trying to be guided by Hyacinth's erratically pointed finger, when

the butler came in and announced his car.

'Well, then, I must give the owl up,' he said. 'My friend's a great stickler for punctuality,' and kissing Hyacinth, who made no effort to detain him, he left the room, quite forgetting the box of fireworks he had left lying on the table.

As he was about to step into his car, he overheard a mocking 'To-whit-a-who!' Remembering an accomplishment of Hyacinth's – she could imitate an owl by whistling through her hands – he looked up towards her window. There she was, leaning far out, her red head gleaming, her pale face strangely elfin in the moonlight. Claud was startled by her beauty.

'Go to bed, Sprite,' he called.

Hyacinth waved her thin white arms.

'Good night, Daddie. See you in the morning!'

Though bitterly cold, the still, starlight night was so beautiful that Claud decided to walk home, and dismissed his car. He and his friend had found much to say to one another, and it was past midnight before he started home. As he strode across the frozen fields, he began to regret his dismissal of the car. The cold, clear silence was only broken by his own footsteps, the occasional hoot of an owl, and the far, far away bark of a lonely dog. He felt too much alone in a white, unshared world.

The present – in which Claud always strove to enwrap himself – receded and faded. Quite powerless to protect him from the past, it became a mere dissolving mist.

A man maimed by one memory, he depended on contact with immediate external things to preoccupy him, to claim his attention so urgently that his senses might not be re-assailed by certain ineffaceable impressions.

Just now he felt abandoned to the past, unprotected by the passage of time. What were time and space but modes of thought? There could be no putting distance between yourself and any experience. What had all the intervening years availed to release him? Nothing.

Claud Halyard had paid dearly for his inheritance. That strained expression friends noticed on his face was due not to the effort to remember, but to the effort to forget – to expunge from his consciousness a haunting memory from which there was no release.

And if I seek oblivion of an hour,
So shorten I the stature of my soul.

In Claud's life there is one hour of which he ceaselessly and desperately seeks oblivion. Struggle as he may, he is now caught back in that hour, forced to relive each agonizing instant. It is superimposed on his present, and all the impressions of twelve intervening years are powerless to soften any of its intensity.

Twelve years ago; it is a moonlight night and, as now, he is walking towards Lichen Hall, the beautiful home of his childhood, the home which so obsesses his imagination that, to him, it seems the core of the entire world. Such love, he feels, should surely establish ownership, but Lichen Hall is not entailed on the male line, and, at the death of its present owner, his widowed and crippled brother, it will pass to that brother's only child, Daphne, who in time will marry and transfer all that wonderful beauty to strangers. He reaches the edge of the park. What is it that so startles him? What strange, terrifying sounds? God! the alarm bell in the great tower is clanging furiously. 'Fire! Fire!' he hears the word shouted.

Sick with dread, he rushes towards the house from which his horror-struck eyes see wreaths of smoke curling. Terrible crackling sounds are coming from one wing, and from the little turret tower in that wing long ribands of flame flutter towards the white moon.

Breathless, he reaches the lawn. The distracted servants have just carried someone out of the house. It is his crippled brother. Claud rushes to him. Struggling to raise his paralysed body, the agonized man clutches at Claud and, pointing towards the house, shrieks, 'Daphne! Daphne!'

Claud realizes the situation. The fire brigade has not yet arrived, and Daphne, who sleeps in the turret tower of the burning wing, has not been got out. The alarm has only just been given, as it is merely a few minutes since the servants were aroused, the fire having gained a strong hold before any of them awoke. So far they have only just had time to carry down their helpless master. The child, they hoped, would have woken and escaped. They expected to find her outside but, to their dismay, she is nowhere to be seen.

With a reassuring shout, Claud dashes into the house. The

staircase leading up to the burning wing is already dense with smoke. Claud smashes a window and, choking, fights his way up and into the suffocating room where he sees Daphne on the floor – lying close to the window. The smoke has been too much for her. She is unconscious – quite unconscious, but breathing. He is in time! Quite easy to fling that light burden over his shoulder, to dash down the stairs and carry her safely out into the blessed air. Vividly Claud sees himself doing this – sees the joy blaze in his brother's eyes.

Simultaneously, an alternative picture presents itself. The child left lying as she is – unconscious – quite unconscious, not suffering, not dreading, not knowing, just *not reawakening*. Unaware. His own future? Lichen Hall?

His body seems to act without any conscious volition. Something takes command of his limbs. 'I never told myself to do it! I never told myself to do it!' How often thereafter was he to mutter these words!

Stooping, he lifts the light body. The burnished red hair brushes against his cheek. In a moment he has shoved her safely out of sight. Now for the stairs. They have become almost impassable. He emerges, choking. 'I can't find her!' he gasps to the horrified crowd. 'She's not in her room. She must have got out.' A frantic scream from his brother. Two minutes later the fire brigade dashes up. Claud takes control, directs the firemen to search for Daphne in every room except her own.

Now he sees the glowing, writhing roof of the little turret tower fall in. Soon the flames are extinguished. All the pictures are saved. The body of a child is found.

'Unfortunately the poor girl had taken refuge beneath her bed, and therefore her gallant uncle was unable to find her.' The coroner's verdict!

Daphne's father. Oh, God, his eyes!

Claud has lived through each moment just as intensely as twelve years ago. Shaking, dripping with perspiration, he drops back into the present.

He still sees his brother's eyes.

Had he loved his Daphne as I love my Hyacinth? At the thought Claud's heart contracts agonizingly. Suppose he had. Why not? Was she not as lovely, as piercingly sweet and young?

Her eagerness! Had he not loved her himself – his dear little niece. The ‘perfect playfellow’ he used to call her. That last evening he had gone to say good night to her in her little Carpaccio bed.

‘Time to go to sleep,’ he had said.

‘Oh, bother sleep!’ she had exclaimed, imploring him to remain. ‘I haven’t had nearly time enough to play!’

Once more he feels the light burden in his arms, the unconscious little body that would so easily have revived to entertain its eager spirit – to welcome it back to the life it loved.

‘Not nearly time enough to play?’ Claud’s mind struggled from the past to the present, to the past again and back to the present. Not nearly time enough to play!

The galloping, riderless rocking-horse? Hyacinth running races alone? His wife’s strange impulses? Hide and seek? Who is it that seeks? These and other things flit through his strained mind.

He is nearly home now – home to Laura and Hyacinth – and tomorrow night they will all three be far from here. Yes, but in the meantime he is still so much in the grip of that fatal hour twelve years ago that he seems actually to hear that awful clanging and the cries of ‘Fire! Fire!’

Heavens, how *real*, how outside himself these hideous sounds seem! But this is past bearing. Are his senses hopelessly haunted? This way lies madness. He must go away – let the house – return to America.

The sounds are insistent – grow louder. The illusion is complete.

God, can it really be *now*?

Turning the corner which brings the distant house into view, Claud stares. Yes, it is true! The present and the past have fused. The bell, the shouts are actual – immediate! It is twelve years later, but Lichen Hall is again on fire, and burning – burning furiously. How can a fire have taken so strong a hold? Every modern device for extinguishing an outbreak had been installed. Claud tears up the hill and reaches the lawn. This time it is the other wing that has caught fire, that in which he, Laura and Hyacinth sleep. Its top storey is already blazing. A crowd stares upward – pale faces red in the reflected glow. That shrieking woman, struggling to escape from arms that hold her back, can

that be Laura? Disjointedly, from various voices, Claud learns the situation. The water-supply is frozen – all the pipes useless. The telephone wires are broken down, but the car has gone for the fire brigade. Any moment now they should be here. In the meantime the child – his child – is upstairs, and the wooden staircase is impassable, was already so before anyone was aware of the outbreak. His wife had not yet gone to bed, and, as only the family sleep in that wing, no one was there. The child is alone up there, trapped in that red horror, and the longest ladder cannot reach to the window of her room. A second ladder? Yes, they are tying two together with ropes, and several men have offered to climb up.

Claud shouts that he will go himself. Thank God the ladders are now securely fastened together! There is still time, but none to lose. The roof must soon fall in.

The ladder has been placed against the wall under Hyacinth's room. Claud's foot is already on its second rung when something catches his eye. At a window there to the right of the one to which he is climbing he sees a child appear. The window is open. Her long, thin arms are outstretched, her red head gleams in the flaring light.

'Move the ladder, quick, quick!' Claud yells distractedly. 'She isn't in her bedroom. She's gone into the other room – the play-room. There! There! Can't you see her? There, hanging out of that window!'

No one sees anything, but blindly they obey. There is a rush and eager arms carry out his orders. The ladder is dragged away to the other window, at which Claud is pointing. It's ready now. Cheers ring out. Claud climbs up, up, up. Near the top he raises his head and finds himself staring into the smiling face of the girl who had perished in the flames twelve years ago. As Claud stares transfixed, the lovely, smiling face blurs and fades away. No one is there.

With a cry no one below could ever forget, Claud hurls himself down the ladder.

'The other window!' he gasps. 'Back to the other window!'

Wonderfully quickly the ladder is moved and replaced, but not quickly enough. The delay has been fatal. Just as the fire engines roar up the drive, the roof falls in.

Again every picture is saved, and a little body is recovered.

M. R. James has been called the prince of ghost story writers. To be more exact, of course, he was a singular exponent of horror fiction, concerned more with the intrusion of evil and the bizarre on the human mind than with the metaphysical implications of his material. His timing is quite exquisite, the decisive phrases and careful stage managing of the plot combining to produce some of the most frightening fiction ever written. 'Lost Hearts' is a story with considerable shock value, but also a special kind of poignancy. Once again the principal actors on the stage are children – both the haunters and the haunted. Although James was writing for Edwardian England, his horrors are undiluted with the passage of time and no anthology of this kind is really complete without one of the products of his scholarly and psychologically intriguing mind. Today we all wince (at least inwardly) when we think of heart transplants, and no amount of expert PR work on the part of the surgeons themselves can quite overcome the instinctive horror we associate with such drastic surgery, whatever its technical or medical merits. Canon James, it seems, has anticipated this.

Lost Hearts

by M. R. James

It was, as far as I can ascertain, in September of the year 1811 that a post-chaise drew up before the door of Aswarby Hall, in the heart of Lincolnshire. The little boy who was the only passenger in the chaise, and who jumped out as soon as it had stopped, looked about him with the keenest curiosity during the short interval that elapsed between the ringing of the bell and the opening of the hall door. He saw a tall, square, red-brick house, built in the reign of Anne; a stone-pillared porch had been added in the purer classical style of 1790; the windows of the house were many, tall and narrow, with small panes and thick white woodwork. A pediment, pierced with a round window, crowned the front. There were wings to right and left, connected

by curious glazed galleries, supported by colonnades, with the central block. These wings plainly contained the stables and offices of the house. Each was surmounted by an ornamental cupola with a gilded vane.

An evening light shone on the building, making the window-panes glow like so many fires. Away from the Hall in front stretched a flat park studded with oaks and fringed with firs, which stood out against the sky. The clock in the church-tower, buried in trees on the edge of the park, only its golden weather-cock catching the light, was striking six, and the sound came gently beating down the wind. It was altogether a pleasant impression, though tinged with the sort of melancholy appropriate to an evening in early autumn, that was conveyed to the mind of the boy who was standing in the porch waiting for the door to open to him.

The post-chaise had brought him from Warwickshire, where, some six months before, he had been left an orphan. Now, owing to the generous offer of his elderly cousin, Mr. Abney, he had come to live at Aswarby. The offer was unexpected, because all who knew anything of Mr. Abney looked upon him as a somewhat austere recluse, into whose steady-going household the advent of a small boy would import a new and, it seemed, incongruous element. The truth is that very little was known of Mr. Abney's pursuits or temper. The Professor of Greek at Cambridge had been heard to say that no one knew more of the religious beliefs of the later pagans than did the owner of Aswarby. Certainly his library contained all the then available books bearing on the Mysteries, the Orphic poems, the worship of Mithras, and the Neo-Platonists. In the marble-paved hall stood a fine group of Mithras slaying a bull, which had been imported from the Levant at great expense by the owner. He had contributed a description of it to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and he had written a remarkable series of articles in the *Critical Museum* on the superstitions of the Romans of the Lower Empire. He was looked upon, in fine, as a man wrapped up in his books, and it was a matter of great surprise among his neighbours that he should even have heard of his orphan cousin, Stephen Elliott, much more that he should have volunteered to make him an inmate of Aswarby Hall.

Whatever may have been expected by his neighbours, it is cer-

tain that Mr. Abney – the tall, the thin, the austere – seemed inclined to give his young cousin a kindly reception. The moment the front door was opened he darted out of his study, rubbing his hands with delight.

‘How are you, my boy? – how are you? How old are you?’ said he – ‘that is, you are not too much tired, I hope, by your journey to eat your supper?’

‘No, thank you, sir,’ said Master Elliott; ‘I am pretty well.’

‘That’s a good lad,’ said Mr. Abney. ‘And how old are you, my boy?’

It seemed a little odd that he should have asked the question twice in the first two minutes of their acquaintance.

‘I’m twelve years old next birthday, sir,’ said Stephen.

‘And when is your birthday, my dear boy? Eleventh of September, eh? That’s well – that’s very well. Nearly a year hence, isn’t it? I like – ha, ha! – I like to get these things down in my book. Sure it’s twelve? Certain?’

‘Yes, quite sure, sir.’

‘Well, well! Take him to Mrs. Bunch’s room, Parkes, and let him have his tea – supper – whatever it is.’

‘Yes, sir,’ answered the staid Mr. Parkes; and conducted Stephen to the lower regions.

Mrs. Bunch was the most comfortable and human person whom Stephen had as yet met in Aswarby. She made him completely at home; they were great friends in a quarter of an hour: and great friends they remained. Mrs. Bunch had been born in the neighbourhood some fifty-five years before the date of Stephen’s arrival, and her residence at the Hall was of twenty years’ standing. Consequently, if anyone knew the ins and outs of the house and the district, Mrs. Bunch knew them; and she was by no means disinclined to communicate her information.

Certainly there were plenty of things about the Hall and the Hall gardens which Stephen, who was of an adventurous and inquiring turn, was anxious to have explained to him. ‘Who built the temple at the end of the laurel walk? Who was the old man whose picture hung on the staircase, sitting at a table, with a skull under his hand?’ These and many similar points were cleared up by the resources of Mrs. Bunch’s powerful intellect. There were others, however, of which the explanations furnished were less satisfactory.

One November evening Stephen was sitting by the fire in the housekeeper's room reflecting on his surroundings.

'Is Mr. Abney a good man, and will he go to heaven?' he suddenly asked, with the peculiar confidence which children possess in the ability of their elders to settle these questions, the decision of which is believed to be reserved for other tribunals.

'Good? - bless the child!' said Mrs. Bunch. 'Master's as kind a soul as ever I see! Didn't I never tell you of the little boy he took in out of the street, as you may say, this seven years back? and the little girl, two years after I first come here?'

'No. Do tell me all about them, Mrs. Bunch - now, this minute!'

'Well,' said Mrs. Bunch, 'the little girl I don't seem to recollect so much about. I know master brought her back with him from his walk one day, and give orders to Mrs. Ellis, as was housekeeper then, as she should be took every care with. And the pore child hadn't no one belonging to her - she telled me so her own self - and here she lived with us a matter of three weeks it might be; and then, whether she were somethink of a gipsy in her blood or what not, but one morning she out of her bed afore any of us had opened a eye, and neither track nor yet trace of her have I set eyes on since. Master was wonderful put about, and had all the ponds dragged; but it's my belief she was had away by them gipsies, for there was singing round the house for as much as an hour the night she went, and Parkes, he declare as he heard them a-calling in the woods all that afternoon. Dear, dear! a hodd child she was, so silent in her ways and all, but I was wonderful taken up with her, so domesticated she was - surprising.'

'And what about the little boy?' said Stephen.

'Ah, that pore boy!' sighed Mrs. Bunch. 'He were a foreigner - Jevanny he called hisself - and he come a-tweaking his 'urdy-gurdy round and about the drive one winter day, and master 'ad him in that minute, and ast all about where he came from, and how old he was, and how he made his way, and where was his relatives, and all as kind as heart could wish. But it went the same way with him. They're a hunruly lot, them foreign nations, I do suppose, and he was off one fine morning just the same as the girl. Why he went and what he done was our question for as much as a year after; for he never took his 'urdy-gurdy, and there it lays on the shelf.'

The remainder of the evening was spent by Stephen in miscellaneous cross-examination of Mrs. Bunch and in efforts to extract a tune from the hurdy-gurdy.

That night he had a curious dream. At the end of the passage at the top of the house, in which his bedroom was situated, there was an old disused bathroom. It was kept locked, but the upper half of the door was glazed, and, since the muslin curtains which used to hang there had long been gone, you could look in and see the lead-lined bath affixed to the wall on the right hand, with its head towards the window.

On the night of which I am speaking, Stephen Elliott found himself, as he thought, looking through the glazed door. The moon was shining through the window, and he was gazing at a figure which lay in the bath.

His description of what he saw reminds me of what I once beheld myself in the famous vaults of St. Michan's Church in Dublin, which possess the horrid property of preserving corpses from decay for centuries. A figure inexpressibly thin and pathetic, of a dusty leaden colour, enveloped in a shroud-like garment, the thin lips crooked into a faint and dreadful smile, the hands pressed tightly over the region of the heart.

As he looked upon it, a distant, almost inaudible moan seemed to issue from its lips, and the arms began to stir. The terror of the sight forced Stephen backwards, and he awoke to the fact that he was indeed standing on the cold boarded floor of the passage in the full light of the moon. With a courage which I do not think can be common among boys of his age, he went to the door of the bathroom to ascertain if the figure of his dream were really there. It was not, and he went back to bed.

Mrs. Bunch was much impressed next morning by his story, and went so far as to replace the muslin curtain over the glazed door of the bathroom. Mr. Abney, moreover, to whom he confided his experiences at breakfast, was greatly interested, and made notes of the matter in what he called 'his book'.

The spring equinox was approaching, as Mr. Abney frequently reminded his cousin, adding that this had been always considered by the ancients to be a critical time for the young; that Stephen would do well to take care of himself, and to shut his bedroom window at night, and that Censorinus had some valuable remarks on the subject. Two incidents that occurred

about this time made an impression upon Stephen's mind.

The first was after an unusually uneasy and oppressed night that he had passed – though he could not recall any particular dream that he had had.

The following evening Mrs. Bunch was occupying herself in mending his nightgown.

'Gracious me, Master Stephen!' she broke forth rather irritably, 'how do you manage to tear your nightdress all to flinders this way? Look here, sir, what trouble you do give to poor servants that have to darn and mend after you!'

There was indeed a most destructive and apparently wanton series of slits or scorings in the garment, which would undoubtedly require a skilful needle to make good. They were confined to the left side of the chest – long, parallel slits, about six inches in length, some of them not quite piercing the texture of the linen. Stephen could only express his entire ignorance of their origin: he was sure they were not there the night before.

'But,' he said, 'Mrs. Bunch, they are just the same as the scratches on the outside of my bedroom door; and I'm sure I never had anything to do with making *them*.'

Mrs. Bunch gazed at him open-mouthed, then snatched up a candle, departed hastily from the room, and was heard making her way upstairs. In a few minutes she came down.

'Well,' she said, 'Master Stephen, it's a funny thing to me how them marks and scratches can 'a' come there – too high up for any cat or dog to 'ave made 'em, much less a rat: for all the world like a Chinaman's finger-nails, as my uncle in the tea-trade used to tell us of when we was girls together. I wouldn't say nothing to master, not if I was you, Master Stephen, my dear; and just turn the key of the door when you go to your bed.'

'I always do, Mrs. Bunch, as soon as I've said my prayers.'

'Ah, that's a good child: always say your prayers, and then no one can't hurt you.'

Herewith Mrs. Bunch addressed herself to mending the injured nightgown, with intervals of meditation, until bed-time. This was on a Friday night in March, 1812.

On the following evening the usual duet of Stephen and Mrs. Bunch was augmented by the sudden arrival of Mr. Parkes, the butler, who as a rule kept himself rather *to* himself in his own pantry. He did not see that Stephen was there: he was, more-

over, flustered, and less slow of speech than was his wont.

'Master may get up his own wine, if he likes, of an evening,' was his first remark. 'Either I do it in the daytime or not at all, Mrs. Bunch. I don't know what it may be: very like it's the rats, or the wind got into the cellars; but I'm not so young as I was, and I can't go through with it as I have done.'

'Well, Mr. Parkes, you know it is a surprising place for the rats, is the Hall.'

'I'm not denying that, Mrs. Bunch; and, to be sure, many a time I've heard the tale from the men in the shipyards about the rat that could speak. I never laid no confidence in that before; but tonight, if I'd demeaned myself to lay my ear to the door of the further bin, I could pretty much have heard what they was saying.'

'Oh, there, Mr. Parkes, I've no patience with your fancies! Rats talking in the wine-cellar indeed!'

'Well, Mrs. Bunch, I've no wish to argue with you: all I say is, if you choose to go to the far bin, and lay your ear to the door, you may prove my words this minute.'

'What nonsense you do talk, Mr. Parkes – not fit for children to listen to! Why, you'll be frightening Master Stephen there out of his wits.'

'What! Master Stephen?' said Parkes, awaking to the consciousness of the boy's presence. 'Master Stephen knows well enough when I'm a-playing a joke with you, Mrs. Bunch.'

In fact, Master Stephen knew much too well to suppose that Mr. Parkes had in the first instance intended a joke. He was interested, not altogether pleasantly, in the situation; but all his questions were unsuccessful in inducing the butler to give any more detailed account of his experiences in the wine-cellar.

We have now arrived at March 24, 1812. It was a day of curious experiences for Stephen: a windy, noisy day, which filled the house and the gardens with a restless impression. As Stephen stood by the fence of the grounds, and looked out into the park, he felt as if an endless procession of unseen people were sweeping past him on the wind, borne on resistlessly and aimlessly, vainly striving to stop themselves, to catch at something that might arrest their flight and bring them once again into contact with the living world of which they had formed a part. After luncheon that day Mr. Abney said:

'Stephen, my boy, do you think you could manage to come to me tonight as late as eleven o'clock in my study? I shall be busy until that time, and I wish to show you something connected with your future life which it is most important that you should know. You are not to mention this matter to Mrs. Bunch nor to anyone else in the house; and you had better go to your room at the usual time.'

Here was a new excitement added to life: Stephen eagerly grasped at the opportunity of sitting up till eleven o'clock. He looked in at the library door on his way upstairs that evening, and saw a brazier, which he had often noticed in the corner of the room, moved out before the fire; an old silver-gilt cup stood on the table, filled with red wine, and some written sheets of paper lay near it. Mr. Abney was sprinkling some incense on the brazier from a round silver box as Stephen passed, but did not seem to notice his step.

The wind had fallen, and there was a still night and a full moon. At about ten o'clock Stephen was standing at the open window of his bedroom, looking out over the country. Still as the night was, the mysterious population of the distant moonlit woods was not yet lulled to rest. From time to time strange cries as of lost and despairing wanderers sounded from across the mere. They might be the notes of owls or water-birds, yet they did not quite resemble either sound. Were not they coming nearer? Now they sounded from the nearer side of the water, and in a few moments they seemed to be floating about among the shrubberies. Then they ceased; but just as Stephen was thinking of shutting the window and resuming his reading of *Robinson Crusoe*, he caught sight of two figures standing on the gravelled terrace that ran along the garden side of the Hall – the figures of a boy and girl, as it seemed; they stood side by side, looking up at the windows. Something in the form of the girl recalled irresistibly his dream of the figure in the bath. The boy inspired him with more acute fear.

Whilst the girl stood still, half smiling, with her hands clasped over her heart, the boy, a thin shape, with black hair and ragged clothing, raised his arms in the air with an appearance of menace and of unappeasable hunger and longing. The moon shone upon his almost transparent hands, and Stephen saw that the nails were fearfully long and that the light shone through them. As he stood with his arms thus raised, he disclosed a terrifying spec-

tacle. On the left side of his chest there opened a black and gaping rent; and there fell upon Stephen's brain, rather than upon his ear, the impression of one of those hungry and desolate cries that he had heard resounding over the woods of Aswarby all that evening. In another moment this dreadful pair had moved swiftly and noiselessly over the dry gravel, and he saw them no more.

Inexpressibly frightened as he was, he determined to take his candle and go down to Mr. Abney's study, for the hour appointed for their meeting was near at hand. The study or library opened out of the front hall on one side, and Stephen, urged on by his terrors, did not take long in getting there. To effect an entrance was not so easy. The door was not locked, he felt sure, for the key was on the outside of it as usual. His repeated knocks produced no answer. Mr. Abney was engaged: he was speaking. What! why did he try to cry out? and why was the cry choked in his throat? Had he, too, seen the mysterious children? But now everything was quiet, and the door yielded to Stephen's terrified and frantic pushing.

On the table in Mr. Abney's study certain papers were found which explained the situation to Stephen Elliott when he was of an age to understand them. The most important sentences were as follows:

'It was a belief very strongly and generally held by the ancients - of whose wisdom in these matters I have had such experience as induces me to place confidence in their assertions - that by enacting certain processes, which to us moderns have something of a barbaric complexion, a very remarkable enlightenment of the spiritual faculties in man may be attained: that, for example, by absorbing the personalities of a certain number of his fellow-creatures, an individual may gain a complete ascendancy over those orders of spiritual beings which control the elemental forces of our universe.

'It is recorded of Simon Magus that he was able to fly in the air, to become invisible, or to assume any form he pleased, by the agency of the soul of a boy whom, to use the libellous phrase employed by the author of the *Clementine Recognitions*, he had "murdered". I find it set down, moreover, with considerable detail in the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, that similar happy

results may be produced by the absorption of the hearts of not less than three human beings below the age of twenty-one years. To the testing of the truth of this receipt I have devoted the greater part of the last twenty years, selecting as the *corpora vilia* of my experiment such persons as could conveniently be removed without occasioning a sensible gap in society. The first step I effected by the removal of one Phoebe Stanley, a girl of gipsy extraction, on March 24, 1792. The second, by the removal of a wandering Italian lad, named Giovanni Paoli, on the night of March 23, 1805. The final "victim" – to employ a word repugnant in the highest degree to my feelings – must be my cousin, Stephen Elliott. His day must be this March 24, 1812.

'The best means of effecting the required absorption is to remove the heart from the *living* subject, to reduce it to ashes, and to mingle them with about a pint of some red wine, preferably port. The remains of the first two subjects, at least, it will be well to conceal: a disused bathroom or wine-cellar will be found convenient for such a purpose. Some annoyance may be experienced from the psychic portion of the subjects, which popular language dignifies with the name of ghosts. But the man of philosophic temperament – to whom alone the experiment is appropriate – will be little prone to attach importance to the feeble efforts of these beings to wreak their vengeance on him. I contemplate with the liveliest satisfaction the enlarged and emancipated existence which the experiment, if successful, will confer on me; not only placing me beyond the reach of human justice (so-called), but eliminating to a great extent the prospect of death itself.'

Mr. Abney was found in his chair, his head thrown back, his face stamped with an expression of rage, fright, and mortal pain. In his left side was a terrible lacerated wound, exposing the heart. There was no blood on his hands, and a long knife that lay on the table was perfectly clean. A savage wild-cat might have inflicted the injuries. The window of the study was open, and it was the opinion of the coroner that Mr. Abney had met his death by the agency of some wild creature. But Stephen Elliott's study of the papers I have quoted led him to a very different conclusion.

When the first nuclear weapons were dropped in 1945 the world realized that it had, at long last, acquired the means to destroy itself, and in the breathless years that followed, in the depths of the Cold War, it seemed that disaster might occur at any moment. As decades have passed, with a genuine nuclear truce in force, the threat has diminished slightly but it has left its apocalyptic mark on all our minds, a new horror to add to mankind's already well-stocked cellar. Not surprisingly, the theme of nuclear conflict, or its aftermath, crops up time and time again in novels and short stories. Theodore Sturgeon's 'Thunder and Roses' which I have chosen is an early example of this genre, written in the dankest depths of the Cold War. While its style is over-dramatized and heavy with baroque imagery, it is nevertheless a masterpiece of emotive writing, steeped in melancholy and foreboding.

Thunder and Roses

by Theodore Sturgeon

When Pete Mawser learned about the show, he turned away from the GHQ bulletin board, touched his long chin, and determined to shave, in spite of the fact that the show would be video, and he would see it in his barracks. He had an hour and a half. It felt good to have a purpose again – even the small matter of shaving before eight o'clock. Eight o'clock Tuesday, just the way it used to be. Everyone used to say, Wednesday morning, 'How about the way Starr sang *The Breeze and I* last night?'

That was a while ago, before the attack, before all those people were dead, before the country was dead. Starr Anthim – an institution, like Crosby, like Duse, like Jenny Lind, like the Statue of Liberty. (Liberty had been one of the first to get it, her bronze beauty volatilized, radio-activated, and even now being carried about in vagrant winds, spreading over the earth . . .)

Pete Mawser grunted and forced his thoughts away from the drifting, poisonous fragments of a blasted liberty. Hate was first.

Hate was ubiquitous, like the increasing blue glow in the air at night, like the tension that hung over the base.

Gunfire cracked sporadically far to the right, swept nearer. Pete stepped out to the street and made for a parked truck. There was a Wac sitting on the short running-board.

At the corner a stocky figure backed into the intersection. The man carried a tommy-gun in his arms, and he was swinging to and fro with the gentle, wavering motion of a weathervane. He staggered toward them, his gun-muzzle hunting. Someone fired from a building and the man swiveled and blasted wildly at the sound.

'He's - blind,' said Pete Mawser, and added, 'he ought to be,' looking at the tattered face.

A siren keened. An armored jeep slewed into the street. The full-throated roar of a brace of .50-caliber machine-guns put a swift and shocking end to the incident.

'Poor crazy kid,' Pete said softly. 'That's the fourth I've seen today.' He looked down at the Wac. She was smiling. 'Hey!'

'Hello, Sarge.' She must have identified him before, because now she did not raise her eyes nor her voice. 'What happened?'

'You know what happened. Some kid got tired of having nothing to fight and nowhere to run to. What's the matter with you?'

'No,' she said. 'I don't mean that.' At last she looked up at him. 'I mean all of this. I can't seem to remember.'

'You - well, it's not easy to forget. We got hit. We got hit everywhere at once. All the big cities are gone. We got it from both sides. We got too much. The air is becoming radioactive. We'll all—' He checked himself. She didn't know. She'd forgotten. There was nowhere to escape to, and she'd escaped inside herself, right here. Why tell her about it? Why tell her that everyone was going to die? Why tell her that other, shameful thing: that we hadn't struck back?

But she wasn't listening. She was still looking at him. Her eyes were not quite straight. One held his, but the other was slightly shifted and seemed to be looking at his temple. She was smiling again. When his voice trailed off she didn't prompt him. Slowly, he moved away. She did not turn her head, but kept looking up at where he had been, smiling a little. He turned away, wanting to run, walking fast.

How long could a guy hold out? When you were in the army they tried to make you be like everybody else. What did you do when everybody else was cracking up?

He blanked out the mental picture of himself as the last one left sane. He'd followed that one through before. It always led to the conclusion that it would be better to be one of the first. He wasn't ready for that yet. Then he blanked that out, too. Every time he said to himself that he wasn't ready for that yet, something within him asked 'Why not?' and he never seemed to have an answer ready.

How long could a guy hold out?

He climbed the steps of the QM Central and went inside. There was nobody at the reception switchboard. It didn't matter. Messages were carried by jeep, or on motor-cycles. The Base Command was not insisting that anybody stick to a sitting job these days. Ten desk-men could crack up for every one on a jeep, or on the soul-sweat squads. Pete made up his mind to put in a little stretch on a squad tomorrow. Do him good. He just hoped that this time the adjutant wouldn't burst into tears in the middle of the parade ground. You could keep your mind on the manual of arms just fine until something like that happened.

He bumped into Sonny Weisfreund in the barracks corridor. The Tech's round young face was as cheerful as ever. He was naked and glowing, and had a towel thrown over his shoulder.

'Hi, Sonny. Is there plenty of hot water?'

'Why not?' grinned Sonny. Pete grinned back, wondering if anybody could say anything about anything at all without one of these reminders. Of course, there was hot water. The QM barracks had hot water for three hundred men. There were three dozen left. Men dead, men gone to the hills, men locked up so they wouldn't—

'Starr Anthim's doing a show tonight.'

'Yeah. Tuesday night. Not funny, Pete. Don't you know there's a war—'

'No kidding,' Pete said swiftly. 'She's here — right here on the base.'

Sonny's face was joyful. 'Gee.' He pulled the towel off his shoulder and tied it around his waist. 'Starr Anthim here! Where are they going to put on the show?'

'HQ, I imagine. Video only. You know about public gatherings.'

'Yeah. And a good thing, too,' said Sonny. 'Somebody'd be sure to crack up. I wouldn't want her to see anything like that. How'd she happen to come here, Pete?'

'Drifted in on the last gasp of a busted-up Navy helicopter.'

'Yeah, but why?'

'Search me. Get your head out of that gift-horse's mouth.'

He went into the washroom, smiling and glad that he still could. He undressed and put his neatly folded clothes down on a bench. There were a soap-wrapper and an empty toothpaste tube lying near the wall. He picked them up and put them in the catchall, took the mop that leaned against the partition and mopped the floor where Sonny had splashed after shaving. Someone had to keep things straight. He might have worried if it were anyone else but Sonny. But Sonny wasn't cracking up. Sonny always had been like that. Look there. Left his razor out again.

Pete started his shower, meticulously adjusting the valves until the pressure and temperature exactly suited him. He did nothing carelessly these days. There was so much to feel, and taste, and see now. The impact of water on his skin, the smell of soap, the consciousness of light and heat, the very pressure of standing on the soles of his feet . . . he wondered vaguely how the slow increase of radioactivity in the air, as the nitrogen transmuted to Carbon Fourteen, would affect him if he kept carefully healthy in every way. What happens first? Blindness? Headaches? Perhaps a loss of appetite or slow fatigue?

Why not look it up?

On the other hand, why bother? Only a very small percentage of the men would die of radioactive poisoning. There were too many other things that killed more quickly, which was probably just as well. That razor, for example. It lay gleaming in a sunbeam, curved and clean in the yellow light. Sonny's father and grandfather had used it, or so he said, and it was his pride and joy.

Pete turned his back on it, and soaped under his arms, concentrating on the tiny kisses of bursting bubbles. In the midst of a recurrence of disgust at himself for thinking so often of death, a

staggering truth struck him. He did not think of such things because he was morbid, after all! It was the very familiarity of things that brought death-thoughts. It was either 'I shall do this again' or 'This is one of the last times I shall do this'. You might devote yourself completely to doing things in different ways, he thought madly. You might crawl across the floor this time, and next time walk across on your hands. You might skip dinner tonight, and have a snack at two in the morning instead, and eat grass for breakfast.

But you had to breathe. Your heart had to beat. You'd sweat and you'd shiver, the same as always. You couldn't get away from that. When those things happened, they would remind you. Your heart wouldn't beat out its *wunklunk, wunklunk* any more. It would go *one-less, one-less*, until it yelled and yammered in your ears and you had to make it stop.

Terrific polish on that razor.

And your breath would go on, same as before. You could sidle through this door, back through the next one and the one after, and figure out a totally new way to go through the one after that, but your breath would keep on sliding in and out of your nostrils like a razor going through whiskers, making a sound like a razor being stropped.

Sonny came in. Pete soaped his hair. Sonny picked up the razor and stood looking-at it. Pete watched him, soap ran into his eyes, he swore, and Sonny jumped.

'What are you looking at, Sonny? Didn't you ever see it before?'

'Oh, sure. Sure. I just was—' He shut the razor, opened it, flashed light from its blade, shut it again. 'I'm tired of using this, Pete. I'm going to get rid of it. Want it?'

Want it? In his foot-locker, maybe. Under his pillow. 'Thanks, no, Sonny. Couldn't use it.'

'I like safety razors,' Sonny mumbled. 'Electrics, even better. What are you going to do with it?'

'Throw it in the — no.' Pete pictured the razor turning end over end in the air, half open, gleaming in the maw of the catch-all. 'Throw it out the—' No. Curving out into the long grass. He might want it. He might crawl around in the moonlight looking for it. He might find it.

'I guess maybe I'll break it up.'

'No,' Pete said. 'The pieces—' Sharp little pieces. Hollow-ground fragments. 'I'll think of something. Wait'll I get dressed.'

He washed briskly, towed, while Sonny stood looking at the razor. It was a blade now, and if it were broken it would be shards and glittering splinters, still razor sharp. If it were ground dull with an emery wheel, somebody could find it and put another edge on it because it was obviously a razor, a fine steel razor, one that would slice so—

'I know. The laboratory. We'll get rid of it,' Pete said confidently.

He stepped into his clothes, and together they went to the laboratory wing. It was very quiet there. Their voices echoed.

'One of the ovens,' said Pete, reaching for the razor.

'Bake-ovens? You're crazy!'

Pete chuckled. 'You don't know this place, do you? Like everything else on the base, there was a lot more went on here than most people knew about. They kept calling it the bakeshop. Well, it *was* research headquarters for new high-nutrient flours. But there's lots else here. We tested utensils and designed vegetable-peelers and all sorts of things like that. There's an electric furnace in there that—' He pushed open a door.

They crossed a long, quiet, cluttered room to the thermal equipment. 'We can do everything here from annealing glass, through glazing ceramics, to finding the melting point of frying pans.' He clicked a switch tentatively. A pilot light glowed. He swung open a small, heavy door and set the razor inside. 'Kiss it goodbye. In twenty minutes it'll be a puddle.'

'I want to see that,' said Sonny. 'Can I look around until it's cooked?'

'Why not?'

They walked through the laboratories. Beautifully equipped they were, and too quiet. Once they passed a major who was bent over a complex electronic hook-up on one of the benches. He was watching a little amber light flicker, and he did not return their salute. They tip-toed past him, feeling awed at his absorption, envying it. They saw the models of the automatic kneaders, the vitaminizers, the remote signal thermostats and timers and controls.

'What's in there?'

'I dunno. I'm over the edge of my territory. I don't think there's anybody left for this section. They were mostly mechanical and electronic theoreticians. Hey!'

Sonny followed the pointing hand. 'What?'

'That wall-section. It's loose, or - well, what do you know!'

He pushed at the section of wall which was very slightly out of line. There was a dark space beyond.

'What's in there?'

'Nothing, or some semi-private hush-hush job. These guys used to get away with murder.'

Sonny said, with an uncharacteristic flash of irony, 'Isn't that the Army theoretician's business?'

Cautiously they peered in, then entered.

'Why - hey! The door!'

It swung swiftly and quietly shut. The soft click of the latch was accompanied by a blaze of light.

The room was small and windowless. It contained machinery - a 'trickle' charger, a bank of storage batteries, an electric-powered dynamo, two small self-starting gas-driven light plants and a diesel complete with sealed compressed-air starting cylinders. In the corner was a relay rack with its panel-bolts spot-welded. Protruding from it was a red-topped lever.

They looked at the equipment wordlessly for a time and then Sonny said, 'Somebody wanted to make awful sure he had power for something.'

'Now I wonder what-' Pete walked over to the relay rack. He looked at the lever without touching it. It was wired up; behind the handle, on the wire, was a folded tag. He opened it cautiously. 'To be used only on specific orders of the Commanding Officer.'

'Give it a yank and see what happens.'

Something clicked behind them. They whirled. 'What was that?'

'Seemed to come from that rig beside the door.'

They approached it cautiously. There was a spring-loaded solenoid attached to a bar which was hinged to drop across the inside of the secret door, where it would fit into steel gudgeons on the panel. It clicked again.

'A Geiger counter,' said Pete disgustedly.

'Now why,' mused Sonny, 'would they design a door to stay

locked unless the general radioactivity went beyond a certain point? That's what it is. See the relays? And the overload switch there? And this?

'It has a manual lock, too,' Pete pointed out. The counter clicked again. 'Let's get out of here. I got one of those things built into my head these days.'

The door opened easily. They went out, closing it behind them. The keyhole was cleverly concealed in the crack between two boards.

They were silent as they made their way back to the QM labs. The small thrill of violation was gone.

Back at the furnace, Pete glanced at the temperature dial, then kicked the latch control. The pilot winked out, and then the door swung open. They blinked and started back from the raging heat within. They bent and peered. The razor was gone. A pool of brilliance lay on the floor of the compartment.

'Ain't much left. Most of it oxidized away,' Pete grunted.

They stood together for a time with their faces lit by the small shimmering ruin. Later, as they walked back to the barracks, Sonny broke his long silence with a sigh. 'I'm glad we did that, Pete. I'm awful glad we did that.'

At a quarter to eight they were waiting before the combination console in the barracks. All hands except Pete and Sonny and a wiry-haired, thick-set corporal named Bonze had elected to see the show on the big screen in the mess-hall. The reception was better there of course, but, as Bonze put it. 'You don't get close enough in a big place like that.'

'I hope she's the same,' said Sonny, half to himself.

Why should she be? thought Pete morosely as he turned on the set and watched the screen begin to glow. There were many more of the golden speckles that had killed reception for the past two weeks. . . . Why should anything be the same, ever again?

He fought a sudden temptation to kick the set to pieces. It, and Starr Anthim, were part of something that was dead. The country was dead, a once real country - prosperous, sprawling, laughing, grabbing, growing, and changing, mostly healthy, leprous in spots with poverty and injustice, but systemically healthy enough to overcome any ill. He wondered how the murderers would like it. They were welcome to it, now. Nowhere to go. No one to fight. That was true for every soul on earth now.

'You hope she's the same,' he muttered.

'The show, I mean,' said Sonny mildly. 'I'd like to just sit here and have it like - like—'

Oh, thought Pete mistily. Oh - that. Somewhere to go, that's what it is, for a few minutes . . . 'I know,' he said, all the harshness gone from his voice.

Noise receded from the audio as the carrier swept in. The light on the screen swirled and steadied into a diamond pattern. Pete adjusted the focus, chromic balance and intensity. 'Turn out the lights, Bonze. I don't want to see anything but Starr Anthim.'

It *was* the same, at first. Starr Anthim had never used the usual fanfares, fade-ins, color and clamor of her contemporaries. A black screen, then *click!* a blaze of gold. It was all there, in focus; tremendously intense, it did not change. Rather, the eye changed to take it in. She never moved for seconds after she came on; she was there, a portrait, a still face and a white throat. Her eyes were open and sleeping. Her face was alive and still.

Then, in the eyes which seemed green but were blue flecked with gold, an awareness seemed to gather, and they came awake. Only then was it noticeable that her lips were parted. Something in the eyes made the lips be seen, though nothing moved yet. Not until she bent her head slowly, so that some of the gold flecks seemed captured in the golden brows. The eyes were not, then, looking out at an audience. They were looking at me and at *me*, and at ME.

'Hello - you,' she said. She was a dream, with a kid sister's slightly irregular teeth.

Bonze shuddered. The cot on which he lay began to squeak rapidly. Sonny shifted in annoyance. Pete reached out in the dark and caught the leg of the cot. The squeaking subsided.

'May I sing a song?' Starr asked. There was music, very faint. 'It's an old one, and one of the best. It's an easy song, a deep song, one that comes from the part of men and women that is mankind - the part that has in it no greed, no hate, no fear. This song is about joyousness and strength. It's - my favorite. Is it yours?'

The music swelled. Pete recognized the first two notes of the introduction and swore quietly. This was wrong. This song was not for - this song was part of—

Sonny sat raptly. Bonze lay still.

Starr Anthim began to sing. His voice was deep and powerful, but soft, with the merest touch of vibrato at the ends of the phrases. The song flowed from her, without noticeable effort, seeming to come from her face, her long hair, her wide-set eyes. Her voice, like her face, was shadowed and clean, round, blue and green but mostly gold.

*When you gave me your heart, you gave me the world,
You gave me the night and the day,
And thunder, and roses, and sweet green grass,
The sea, and soft wet clay.*

*I drank the dawn from a golden cup,
From a silver one, the dark,
The steed I rode was the wild west wind,
My song was the brook and the lark.*

The music spiraled, caroled, slid into a sombre cry of muted hungry sixths and ninths; rose, blared, and cut, leaving her voice full and alone:

*With thunder I smote the evil of earth,
With roses I won the right,
With the sea I washed, and with clay I built,
And the world was a place of light!*

The last note left a face perfectly composed again, and there was no movement in it; it was sleeping and vital while the music curved off and away to the places where music rests when it is not heard.

Starr smiled.

'It's so easy,' she said. 'So simple. All that is fresh and clean and strong about mankind is in that song, and I think that's all that need concern us about mankind.' She leaned forward. 'Don't you see?'

The smile faded and was replaced with a gentle wonder. A tiny furrow appeared between her brows; she drew back quickly. 'I can't seem to talk to you tonight,' she said, her voice small. 'You hate something.'

Hate was shaped like a monstrous mushroom. Hate was the random speckling of a video plate.

'What has happened to us,' said Starr abruptly, impersonally, 'is simple too. It doesn't matter who did it – do you understand that? *It* doesn't matter. We were attacked. We were struck from the east and from the west. Most of the bombs were atomic – there were blast-bombs and there were dust-bombs. We were hit by about five hundred and thirty bombs altogether, and it has killed us.'

She waited.

Sonny's fist smacked into his palm. Bonze lay with his eyes open, quiet. Pete's jaws hurt.

'We have more bombs than both of them put together. We *have* them. We are not going to use them. *Wait!*' She raised her hands suddenly, as if she could see into each man's face. They sank back, tense.

'So saturated is the atmosphere with Carbon Fourteen that all of us in this hemisphere are going to die. Don't be afraid to say it. Don't be afraid to think it. It is a truth, and it must be faced. As the transmutation effect spreads from the ruins of our cities, the air will become increasingly radioactive, and then we must die. In months, in a year or so, the effect will be strong overseas. Most of the people there will die too. None will escape completely. A worse thing will come to them than anything they have given us, because there will be a wave of horror and madness which is impossible to us. We are merely going to die. They will live and burn and sicken, and the children that will be born to them—' she shook her head, and her lower lip grew full. She visibly pulled herself together.

'Five hundred and thirty bombs . . . I don't think either of our attackers knew just how strong the other was. There has been so much secrecy.' Her voice was sad. She shrugged slightly. 'They have killed us, and they have ruined themselves. As for us – we are not blameless, either. Neither are we helpless to do anything – yet. But what we must do is hard. We must die – without striking back.'

She gazed briefly at each man in turn, from the screen. 'We must *not* strike back. Mankind is about to go through a hell of his own making. We can be vengeful – or merciful, if you like – and let go with the hundreds of bombs we have. That would sterilize the planet so that not a microbe, not a blade of grass could escape, and nothing new could grow. We would reduce the

earth to a bald thing, dead and deadlly.

'No - it just won't do. We can't do it.

'Remember the song? *That* is humanity. That's in all humans. A disease made other humans our enemies for a time, but as the generations march past, enemies become friends and friends enemies. The enmity of those who have killed us is such a tiny, temporary thing in the long sweep of history!'

Her voice deepened. 'Let us die with the knowledge that we have done the one noble thing left to us. The spark of humanity can still live and grow on this planet. It will be blown and drenched, shaken and all but extinguished, but it will live if that song is a true one. It will live if we are human enough to discount the fact that the spark is in the custody of our temporary enemy. Some - a few - of his children will live to merge with the new humanity that will gradually emerge from the jungles and the wilderness. Perhaps there will be ten thousand years of beastliness; perhaps man will be able to rebuild while he still has his ruins.'

She raised her head, her voice tolling. 'And even if this is the end of humankind, we dare not take away the chances some other life-form might have to succeed where we failed. If we retaliate, there will not be a dog, a deer, an ape, a bird or fish or lizard to carry the evolutionary torch. In the name of justice, if we must condemn and destroy ourselves, let us not condemn all other life along with us! Mankind is heavy enough with sins. If we must destroy, let us stop with destroying ourselves!'

There was a shimmering flicker of music. It seemed to stir her hair like a breath of wind. She smiled.

'That's all,' she whispered. And to each man listening she said, 'Good night . . .'

The screen went black. As the carrier cut off (there was no announcement) the ubiquitous speckles began to swarm across it.

Pete rose and switched on the lights. Bonze and Sonny were quite still. It must have been minutes later when Sonny sat up straight, shaking himself like a puppy. Something besides the silence seemed to tear with the movement.

He said, softly, 'You're not allowed to fight anything, or to run away, or to live, and now you can't even hate any more, because Starr says no.'

There was bitterness in the sound of it, and a bitter smell to the air.

Pete Mawser sniffed once, which had nothing to do with the smell. He sniffed again. 'What's that smell, Son?'

Sonny tested it. 'I don't - Something familiar. Vanilla - no . . . No.'

'Almonds. Bitter - Bonze!'

Bonze lay still with his eyes open, grinning. His jaw muscles were knotted, and they could see almost all his teeth. He was soaking wet.

'Bonze!'

'It was just when she came on and said "Hello - you", remember?' whispered Pete. 'Oh, the poor kid. That's why he wanted to catch the show here instead of in the mess-hall.'

'Went out looking at her,' said Sonny through pale lips. 'I - can't say I blame him much. Wonder where he got the stuff.'

'Never mind that!' Pete's voice was harsh. 'Let's get out of here.'

They left to call the ambulance. Bonze lay watching the console with his dead eyes and his smell of bitter almonds.

Pete did not realize where he was going, or exactly why, until he found himself on the dark street near GHQ and the communications shack, reflecting that it might be nice to be able to hear Starr, and see her, whenever he felt like it. Maybe there weren't any recordings; yet her musical background was recorded, and the signal corps might have recorded the show.

He stood uncertainly outside the GHQ building. There was a cluster of men outside the main entrance. Pete smiled briefly. Rain, nor snow, nor sleet, nor gloom of night could stay the stage-door Johnnie.

He went down the side street and up the delivery ramp in the back. Two doors along the platform was the rear exit of the Communications section.

There was a light on in the communications shack. He had his hand out to the screen door when he noticed someone standing in the shadows beside it. The light played daintily on the golden margins of a head and face.

He stopped. 'S - Starr Anthim!'

'Hello, soldier. Sergeant.'

He blushed like an adolescent. 'I—' His voice left him. He swallowed, reached up to whip off his hat. He had no hat. 'I saw the show,' he said. He felt clumsy. It was dark, and yet he was very conscious of the fact that his dress-shoes were indifferently shined.

She moved toward him into the light, and she was so beautiful that he had to close his eyes. 'What's your name?'

'Mawser, Pete Mawser.'

'Like the show?'

Not looking at her, he said stubbornly, 'No.'

'Oh?'

'I mean — I liked it some. The song.'

'I — think I see.'

'I wondered if I could maybe get a recording.'

'I think so,' she said. 'What kind of reproducer have you got?'

'Audiovid.'

'A disc. Yes; we dubbed off a few. Wait, I'll get you one.'

She went inside, moving slowly. Pete watched her, spellbound. She was a silhouette, crowned and haloed; and then she was a framed picture, vivid and golden. He waited, watching the light hungrily. She returned with a large envelope, called good night to someone inside, and came out on the platform.

'Here you are, Pete Mawser.'

'Thanks very—' he mumbled. He wet his lips. 'It was very good of you.'

'Not really. The more it circulates, the better.' She laughed suddenly. 'That isn't meant quite as it sounds. I'm not exactly looking for new publicity these days.'

The stubbornness came back. 'I don't know that you'd get it, if you put on that show in normal times.'

Her eyebrows went up. 'Well!' she smiled. 'I seem to have made quite an impression.'

'I'm sorry,' he said warmly, 'I shouldn't have taken that tack. Everything I think and say these days is exaggerated.'

'I know what you mean.' She looked around. 'How is it here?'

'It's okay. I used to be bothered by the secrecy, and being buried miles away from civilization.' He chuckled bitterly. 'Turned out to be lucky after all.'

'You sound like the first chapter of *One World or None*.'

He looked up quickly. 'What do you use for a reading list – the Government's own *Index Expurgatorius*?'

She laughed. 'Come now, it isn't as bad as all that. The book was never banned. It was just—'

'Unfashionable,' he filled in.

'Yes, more's the pity. If people had paid more attention to it in the 'forties, perhaps this wouldn't have happened.'

He followed her gaze to the dimly pulsating sky. 'How long are you going to be here?'

'Until – as long as – I'm not leaving.'

'You're not?'

'I'm finished,' she said simply. 'I've covered all the ground I can. I've been everywhere that . . . anyone knows about.'

'With this show?'

She nodded. 'With this particular message.'

He was quiet, thinking. She turned to the door, and he put out his hand, not touching her. 'Please—'

'What is it?'

'I'd like to – I mean, if you don't mind, I don't often have a chance to talk to – maybe you'd like to walk around a little before you turn in.'

'Thanks, no, Sergeant. I'm tired.' She did sound tired. 'I'll see you around.'

He stared at her, a sudden fierce light in his brain. 'I know where it is. It's got a red-topped lever and a tag referring to orders of the commanding officer. It's really camouflaged.'

She was quiet so long that he thought she had not heard him. Then, 'I'll take that walk.'

They went down the ramp together and turned toward the dark parade ground.

'How did you know?' she asked quietly.

'Not too tough. This "message" of yours; the fact that you've been all over the country with it; most of all, the fact that somebody finds it necessary to persuade us not to strike back. Who are you working for?' he asked bluntly.

Surprisingly, she laughed.

'What's that for?'

'A moment ago you were blushing and shuffling your feet.'

His voice was rough. 'I wasn't talking to a human being. I was

talking to a thousand songs I've heard, and a hundred thousand blonde pictures I've seen pinned up. You'd better tell me what this is all about.'

She stopped. 'Let's go up and see the colonel.'

He took her elbow. 'No. I'm just a sergeant, and he's high brass, and that doesn't make any difference at all now. You're a human being, and so am I, and I'm supposed to respect your rights as such. I don't. You'd better tell me about it.'

'All right,' she said, with a tired acquiescence that frightened something inside him. 'You seem to have guessed right, though. It's true. There are master firing keys for the launching sites. We have located and dismantled all but two. It's very likely that one of the two was vaporized. The other one is - lost.'

'Lost?'

'I don't have to tell you about the secrecy,' she said. 'You know how it developed between nation and nation. You must know that it existed between State and Union, between department and department, office and office. There were only three or four men who knew where all the keys were. Three of them were in the Pentagon when it went up. That was the third blast bomb, you know. If there was another, it could only have been Senator Vanercook, and he died three weeks ago without talking.'

'An automatic radio key, *hm*?'

'That's right. Sergeant, must we walk? I'm so tired.'

'I'm sorry,' he said impulsively. They crossed to the reviewing stand and sat on the lonely benches. 'Launching racks all over, all hidden, and all armed?'

'Most of them are armed. There's a timing mechanism in them that will disarm them in a year or so. But in the meantime, they are armed - and aimed.'

'Aimed where?'

'It doesn't matter.'

'I think I see. What's the optimum number again?'

'About six hundred and forty; a few more or less. At least five hundred and thirty have been thrown so far. We don't know exactly.'

'Who are *we*?' he asked furiously.

'Who? Who?' She laughed weakly. 'I could say, "The Government," perhaps. If the President dies, the Vice-President takes over, and then the Secretary of State, and so on and on. How far

can you go? Pete Mawser, don't you realize yet what's happened?'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'How many people do you think are left in this country?'

'I don't know. Just a few million, I guess.'

'How many are here?'

'About nine hundred.'

'Then, as far as I know, this is the largest city left.'

He leaped to his feet. *'No!'* The syllable roared away from him, hurled itself against the dark, empty buildings, came back to him in a series of lower-case echoes: *nononono . . . no-no.*

Starr began to speak rapidly, quietly. 'They're scattered all over the fields and the roads. They sit in the sun and die. They run in packs, they tear at each other. They pray and starve and kill themselves and die in the fires. The fires - everywhere, if anything stands, it's burning. Summer, and the leaves all down in the Berkshires, and the blue grass burnt brown; you can see the grass dying from the air, the death going out wider and wider from the bald-spots. Thunder and roses. . . . I saw roses, new ones, creeping from the smashed pots of a greenhouse. Brown petals, alive and sick, and the thorns turned back on themselves, growing into the stems, killing. Feldman died tonight.'

He let her be quiet for a time. Then:

'Who is Feldman?'

'My pilot.' She was talking hollowly into her hands. 'He's been dying for weeks. He's been on his nerve-ends. I don't think he had any blood left. He came in with the motor dead, free rotors, giro. Smashed in the landing gear. He was dead, too. He killed a man in Chicago so he could steal gas. The man didn't want the gas. There was a dead girl by the pump. He didn't want us to go near. I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to stay here. I'm tired.'

At last she cried.

Pete left her alone, and walked out to the center of the parade ground, looking back at the faint huddled glimmer on the bleachers. His mind flickered over the show that evening, and the way she had sung before the merciless transmitter. 'Hello, you.' 'If we must destroy, let us stop with destroying ourselves!'

The dimming spark of humankind . . . what could it mean to her? How could it mean so much?

'Thunder and roses.' Twisted, sick, non-survival roses, killing themselves with their own thorns.

'And the world was a place of light!' Blue light, flickering in the contaminated air.

The enemy. The red-topped lever. Bonze. 'They pray and starve and kill themselves and die in the fires.'

What creatures were these, these corrupted, violent, murdering humans? What right had they to another chance? What was in them that was good?

Starr was good. Starr was crying. Only a human being could cry like that. Starr was a human being.

Had humanity anything of Starr Anthim in it?

Starr was a human being.

He looked down through the darkness for his hands. No planet, no universe, is greater to a man than his own ego, his own observing self. These hands were the hands of all history, and like the hands of all men, they could by their small acts make human history or end it. Whether this power of hands was that of a billion hands, or whether it came to a focus in these two — this was suddenly unimportant to the eternities which now unfolded him.

He put humanity's hands deep in his pockets and walked slowly back to the bleachers.

'Starr.'

She responded with a sleepy-child, interrogative whimper.

'They'll get their chance, Starr. I won't touch the key.'

She sat straight. She rose, and came to him, smiling. He could see her smile, because, very faintly in this air, her teeth fluoresced. She put her hands on his shoulders. 'Pete.'

He held her very close for a moment. Her knees buckled then, and he had to carry her.

There was no one in the Officers' Club, which was the nearest building. He stumbled in, moved clawing along the wall until he found a switch. The light hurt him. He carried her to a settee and put her down gently. She did not move. One side of her face was as pale as milk.

He stood looking stupidly at it, wiped it on the sides of his trousers, looking dully at Starr. There was blood on her shirt.

A doctor . . . but there was no doctor. Not since Anders had hanged himself. 'Get somebody,' he muttered. 'Do something.'

He dropped to his knees and gently unbuttoned her shirt. Between the sturdy, unfeminine GI bra and the top of her slacks, there was blood on her side. He whipped out a clean handkerchief and began to wipe it away. There was no wound, no puncture. But abruptly there was blood again. He blotted it carefully. And again there was blood.

It was like trying to dry a piece of ice with a towel.

He ran to the water cooler, wrung out the bloody handkerchief and ran back to her. He bathed her face carefully, the pale right side, the flushed left side. The handkerchief reddened again, this time with cosmetics, and then her face was pale all over, with great blue shadows under the eyes. While he watched, blood appeared on her left cheek.

'There must be somebody—' He fled to the door.

'Pete!'

Running, turning at the sound of her voice, he hit the doorpost stunningly, caromed off, flailed for his balance, and then was back at her side. 'Starr! Hang on, now! I'll get a doctor as quick as—'

Her hand strayed over her left cheek. 'You found out. Nobody else knew, but Feldman. It got hard to cover properly.' Her hand went up to her hair.

'Starr, I'll get a—'

'Pete, darling, promise me something?'

'Why, sure; certainly, Starr.'

'Don't disturb my hair. It isn't — all mine, you see.' She sounded like a seven-year-old, playing a game. 'It all came out on this side. I don't want you to see me that way.'

He was on his knees beside her again. 'What is it? What happened to you?' he asked hoarsely.

'Philadelphia,' she murmured. 'Right at the beginning. The mushroom went up a half-mile away. The studio caved in. I came to the next day. I didn't know I was burned, then. It didn't show. My left side. It doesn't matter, Pete. It doesn't hurt at all now.'

He sprang to his feet again. 'I'm going for a doctor.'

'Don't go away. Please don't go away and leave me. Please don't.' There were tears in her eyes. 'Wait just a little while. Not very long, Pete.'

He sank to his knees again. She gathered both his hands in hers and held them tightly. She smiled happily. 'You're good, Pete. You're so good.'

(She couldn't hear the blood in his ears, the roar of the whirlpool of hate and fear and anguish that spun inside of him.)

She talked to him in a low voice, and then in whispers. Sometimes he hated himself because he couldn't quite follow her. She talked about school, and her first audition. 'I was so scared that I got a vibrato in my voice. I'd never had one before. I always let myself get a little scared when I sing now. It's easy.' There was something about a window-box when she was four years old. 'Two real live tulips and a pitcher-plant. I used to be sorry for the flies.'

There was a long period of silence after that, during which his muscles throbbed with cramp and stiffness, and gradually became numb. He must have dozed; he awoke with a violent start, feeling her fingers on his face. She was propped up on one elbow. She said clearly. 'I just wanted to tell you, darling. Let me go first, and get everything ready for you. It's going to be wonderful. I'll fix you a special tossed salad. I'll make you a steamed chocolate pudding and keep it hot for you.'

Too muddled to understand what she was saying, he smiled and pressed her back on the settee. She took his hands again.

The next time he awoke it was broad daylight, and she was dead.

Sonny Weisfreund was sitting on his cot when he got back to the barracks. He handed over the recording he had picked up from the parade ground on the way back. 'Dew on it. Dry it off. Good boy,' he croaked, and fell face downward on the cot Bonze had used.

Sonny stared at him. 'Pete! Where you been? What happened? Are you all right?'

Pete shifted a little and grunted. Sonny shrugged and took the audiovid disc out of its wet envelope. Moisture would not harm it particularly, though it could not be played while wet. It was made of a fine spiral of plastic, insulated between laminations. Electrostatic pickups above and below the turntable would fluctuate with changes in the dielectric constant which had been impressed by the recording, and these changes were amplified for

the scanners. The audio was a conventional hill-and-dale needle. Sonny began to wipe it down carefully.

Pete fought upward out of a vast, green-lit place full of flickering cold fires. Starr was calling him. Something was punching him, too. He fought weakly, trying to hear what she was saying. But someone else was jabbing too loud for him to hear.

He opened his eyes. Sonny was shaking him, his round face pink with excitement. The Audiovid was running. Starr was talking. Sonny got up impatiently and turned down the volume. 'Pete! Pete! Wake up, will you? I got to tell you something. Listen to me! Wake up, will yuh!'

'Huh?'

'That's better. Now listen, I've just been listening to Starr Anthim—'

'She's dead,' said Pete.

Sonny didn't hear. He went on, explosively, 'I've figured it out. Starr was sent out here, and all over, to *beg* someone not to fire any more atom bombs. If the government was sure they wouldn't strike back, they wouldn't've taken the trouble. Somewhere, Pete, there's some way to launch bombs at those murdering cowards — and I've got a pret-ty shrewd idea of how to do it.'

Pete strained groggily toward the faint sound of Starr's voice. Sonny talked on. 'Now, s'posing there was a master radio key — an automatic code device something like the alarm signal they have on ships, that rings a bell on any ship within radio range when the operator sends four long dashes. Suppose there's an automatic code machine to launch bombs, with repeaters, maybe, buried all over the country. What would it be? Just a little lever to pull; that's all. How would the thing be hidden? In the middle of a lot of other equipment, that's where; in some place where you'd expect to find crazy-looking secret stuff. Like an experiment station. Like right here. You beginning to get the idea?'

'Shut up, I can't hear her.'

'The hell with her! You can listen to her some other time. You didn't hear a thing I said!'

'She's dead.'

'Yeah. Well, I figure I'll pull that handle. What can I lose? It'll give those murderin' — *what?*'

'She's dead.'

'Dead? Starr Anthim?' His young face twisted, Sonny sank down to the cot. 'You're half asleep. You don't know what you're saying.'

'She's dead,' Pete said hoarsely. 'She got burned by one of the first bombs. I was with her when she — she— Shut up now and get out of here and let me listen!' he bellowed hoarsely.

Sonny stood up slowly. 'They killed her, too. They killed her! That does it. That just fixes it up.' His face was white. He went out.

Pete got up. His legs weren't working right. He almost fell. He brought up against the console with a crash, his out-flung arm sending the pickup skittering across the record. He put it on again and turned up the volume, then lay down to listen.

His head was all mixed up. Sonny talked too much. Bomb launchers, automatic code machines—

'You gave me your heart,' sang Starr. 'You gave me your heart. You gave me your heart. You . . .'

Pete heaved himself up again and moved the pickup arm. Anger, not at himself, but at Sonny for causing him to cut the disc that way welled up.

Starr was talking, stupidly, her face going through the same expression over and over again. *'Struck from the east and from the struck from the east and from the . . .'*

He got up again wearily and moved the pickup.

'You gave me your heart you gave me . . .'

Pete made an agonized sound that was not a word at all, bent, lifted, and sent the console crashing over. In the bludgeoning silence he said, 'I did, too.'

Then, 'Sonny.' He waited.

'Sonny!'

His eyes went wide then, and he cursed and bolted for the corridor.

The panel was closed when he reached it. He kicked at it. It flew open, discovering darkness.

'Hey!' bellowed Sonny. 'Shut it! You turned off the lights!'

Pete shut it behind them. The lights blazed.

'Pete! What's the matter?'

'Nothing's the matter, Son,' croaked Pete.

'What are you looking at?' said Sonny uneasily.

'I'm sorry,' said Pete as gently as he could. 'I just wanted to find something out, is all. Did you tell anyone else about this?' He pointed to the lever.

'Why, no. I only just figured it out while you were sleeping, just now.'

Pete looked around carefully, while Sonny shifted his weight. Pete moved toward the tool-rack. 'Something you haven't noticed yet, Sonny,' he said softly, and pointed. 'Up there, on the wall behind you. High up. See?'

Sonny turned. In one fluid movement Pete plucked off a fourteen-inch box wrench and hit Sonny with it as hard as he could.

Afterward he went to work systematically on the power supplies. He pulled the plugs on the gas-engines and cracked their cylinders with a maul. He knocked off the tubing of the diesel starters – the tanks let go explosively – and he cut all the cables with bolt-cutters. Then he broke up the relay rack and its lever. When he was quite finished, he put away his tools and bent and stroked Sonny's tousled hair.

He went out and closed the partition carefully. It certainly was a wonderful piece of camouflage. He sat down heavily on a workbench nearby.

'You'll have your chance,' he said into the far future. 'And, by Heaven, you'd better make good.'

After that he just waited.

An old legend says that at the moment of death, one's whole life passes before one in a spasm of suspended time. The dull revelations of Spiritualism aside, we have little corroborative information as to what are the subjective experiences of the dying; for some no doubt they are blissful, for others perhaps nightmarish. The curious American writer, Ambrose Bierce, whose own death – he vanished without trace in 1914 – is itself shrouded in mystery, took the notion of the 'extended moment' of death to weave it into an absolute masterpiece of a short story, 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge'. Like many a good horror tale, the real wrench is not experienced until the end or even perhaps when it is re-read. 'Owl Creek' was fairly recently made into a brilliant short movie which successfully trapped the flavour of Bierce's carefully-worded narrative.

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge

by Ambrose Bierce

A man stood upon a railroad bridge in Northern Alabama, looking down into the swift waters twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope loosely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head, and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the sleepers supporting the metals of the railway supplied a footing for him and his executioners – two private soldiers of the Federal army, directed by a sergeant, who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. At a short remove upon the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed. He was a captain. A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as 'support', that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest – a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body. It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the centre of the bridge; they merely blockaded the two ends of the foot-plank which traversed it.

Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight; the railroad ran straight away into a forest for a hundred yards, then, curving, was lost to view. Doubtless there was an outpost further along. The other bank of the stream was open ground – a gentle acclivity crowned with a stockade of vertical tree trunks, loop-holed for rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge. Midway of the slope between bridge and fort were the spectators – a single company of infantry in line, at ‘parade rest’, the butts of the rifles on the ground, the barrels inclining slightly backward against the right shoulder, the hands crossed upon the stock. A lieutenant stood at the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right. Excepting the group of four at the centre of the bridge not a man moved. The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless. The sentries, facing the banks of the stream, might have been statues to adorn the bridge. The captain stood with folded arms, silent, observing the work of his subordinates but making no sign. Death is a dignitary who, when he comes announced, is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him. In the code of military etiquette silence and fixity are forms of deference.

The man who was engaged in being hanged was apparently about thirty-five years of age. He was a civilian, if one might judge from his dress, which was that of a planter. His features were good – a straight nose, firm mouth, broad forehead, from which his long, dark hair was combed straight back, falling behind his ears to the collar of his well-fitting frock coat. He wore a moustache and pointed beard, but no whiskers; his eyes were large and dark grey and had a kindly expression which one would hardly have expected in one whose neck was in the hemp. Evidently this was no vulgar assassin. The liberal military code makes provision for hanging many kinds of people, and gentlemen are not excluded.

The preparations being complete, the two private soldiers stepped aside and each drew away the plank upon which he had been standing. The sergeant turned to the captain, saluted and placed himself immediately behind the officer, who in turn moved apart one pace. These movements left the condemned man and the sergeant standing on the two ends of the same

plank, which spanned three of the cross ties of the bridge. The end upon which the civilian stood almost, but not quite, reached a fourth. This plank had been held in place by the weight of the captain; it was now held by that of the sergeant. At a signal from the former the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt and the condemned man go down between the two ties. The arrangement commended itself to his judgment as simple and effective. His face had not been covered nor his eyes bandaged. He looked a moment at his 'unsteadfast footing,' then let his gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his feet. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move! What a sluggish stream!

He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift - all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or near by - it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. He awaited each stroke with impatience and - he knew not why - apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him. 'If I could free my hands,' he thought, 'I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. By diving I could evade the bullets, and, swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods, and get away home. My home, thank God, is as yet outside their lines; my wife and little ones are still beyond the invader's farthest advance.'

II

Peyton Farquhar was a well-to-do planter, of an old and highly-respected Alabama family. Being a slave owner, and, like other slave owners, a politician, he was naturally an original secessionist and ardently devoted to the Southern cause. Circumstances of an imperious nature, which it is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with the gallant army which had fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth, and he chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction. That opportunity, he felt, would come, as it comes to all in war time. Meanwhile he did what he could. No service was too humble for him to perform in aid of the South, no adventure too perilous for him to undertake if consistent with the character of a civilian who was at heart a soldier, and who in good faith and without too much qualification assented to at least a part of the frankly villainous dictum that all is fair in love and war.

One evening while Farquhar and his wife were sitting on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds, a grey-clad soldier rode up to the gate and asked for a drink of water. Mrs. Farquhar was only too happy to serve him with her own white hands. While she was gone to fetch the water, her husband approached the dusty horseman and inquired eagerly for news from the front.

'The Yanks are repairing the railroads,' said the man 'and are getting ready for another advance. They have reached the Owl Creek bridge, put it in order, and built a stockade on the other bank. The commandant has issued an order, which is posted everywhere, declaring that any civilian caught interfering with the railroad, its bridges, tunnels, or trains, will be summarily hanged. I saw the order.'

'How far is it to the Owl Creek bridge?' Farquhar asked.

'About thirty miles.'

'Is there no force on this side of the creek?'

'Only a picket-post half a mile out, on the railroad, and a single sentinel at this end of the bridge.'

'Suppose a man - a civilian and student of hanging - should

clude the picket-post and perhaps get the better of the sentinel,' said Farquhar, smiling, 'what could he accomplish?'

The soldier reflected. 'I was there a month ago,' he replied. 'I observed that the flood of last winter had lodged a great quantity of driftwood against the wooden pier at this end of the bridge. It is now dry and would burn like tow.'

The lady had now brought the water, which the soldier drank. He thanked her ceremoniously, bowed to her husband, and rode away. An hour later, after nightfall, he repassed the plantation, going northward in the direction from which he had come. He was a Federal scout.

III

As Peyton Farquhar fell straight downward through the bridge he lost consciousness and was as one already dead. From this state he was awakened – ages later, it seemed to him – by the pain of a sharp pressure upon his throat, followed by a sense of suffocation. Keen, poignant agonies seemed to shoot from his neck downward through every fibre of his body and limbs. These pains appeared to flash along well-defined lines of ramification, and to beat with an inconceivably rapid periodicity. They seemed like streams of pulsating fire heating him to an intolerable temperature. As to his head, he was conscious of nothing but a feeling of fullness – of congestion. These sensations were unaccompanied by thought. The intellectual part of his nature was already effaced; he had the power only to feel, and feeling was torment. He was conscious of motion. Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a vast pendulum. Then all at once, with terrible suddenness, the light about him shot upward with the noise of a loud splash; a frightful roaring was in his ears, and all was cold and dark. The power of thought was restored; he knew that the rope had broken and he had fallen into the stream. There was no additional strangulation; the noose about his neck was already suffocating him, and kept the water from his lungs. To die of hanging at the bottom of a river! – the idea seemed to him ludicrous. He opened his eyes in the blackness and saw above him a gleam of light, but how distant, how inaccessible! He was still sinking, for the light

became fainter and fainter until it was a mere glimmer. Then it began to grow and brighten, and he knew that he was rising toward the surface – knew it with reluctance, for he was now very comfortable. ‘To be hanged and drowned,’ he thought, ‘that is not so bad; but I do not wish to be shot. No; I will not be shot; that is not fair.’

He was not conscious of an effort, but a sharp pain in his wrists apprised him that he was trying to free his hands. He gave the struggle his attention, as an idler might observe the feat of a juggler, without interest in the outcome. What splendid effort! – what magnificent, what superhuman strength! Ah, that was a fine endeavour! Bravo! The cord fell away; his arms parted and floated upward, the hands dimly seen on each side in the growing light. He watched them with a new interest as first one then the other pounced upon the noose at his neck. They tore it away and thrust it fiercely aside, its undulations resembling those of a water-snake. ‘Put it back, put it back!’ He thought he shouted words to his hands, for the undoing of the noose had been succeeded by the direst pang which he had yet experienced. His neck ached horribly; his brain was on fire; his heart, which had been fluttering faintly, gave a great leap, trying to force itself out of his mouth. His whole body was racked and wrenched with an insupportable anguish! But his disobedient hands gave no heed to the command. They beat the water vigorously with quick, downward strokes, forcing him to the surface. He felt his head emerge; his eyes were blinded by the sunlight; his chest expanded convulsively, and with a supreme and crowning agony his lungs engulfed a great draught of air, which instantly he expelled in a shriek!

He was now in full possession of his physical senses. They were, indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon his face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf – saw the very insects upon them, the locusts, the brilliant-bodied flies, the grey spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colours in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass. The humming of the gnats that danced above the

eddies of the stream, the beating of the dragon-flies' wings, the strokes of the water-spiders' legs, like oars which had lifted their boat – all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water.

He had come to the surface facing down-stream; in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly round, himself the pivotal point, and he saw the bridge, the fort, the soldiers upon the bridge, the captain, the sergeant, the two privates, his executioners. They were in silhouette against the blue sky. They shouted and gesticulated, pointing at him; the captain had drawn his pistol, but did not fire; the others were unarmed. Their movements were grotesque and horrible, their forms gigantic.

Suddenly he heard a sharp report and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head, spattering his face with spray. He heard a second report and saw one of the sentinels with his rifle at his shoulder, a light cloud of blue smoke rising from the muzzle. The man in the water saw the eye of the man on the bridge gazing into his own through the sights of the rifle. He observed that it was a grey eye, and remembered having read that grey eyes were keenest and that all famous marksmen had them. Nevertheless, this one had missed.

A counter swirl had caught Farquhar and turned him half round; he was again looking into the forest on the bank opposite the fort. The sound of a clear, high voice in a monotonous sing-song now rang out behind him and came across the water with a distinctness that pierced and subdued all other sounds, even the beating of the ripples in his ears. Although no soldier, he had frequented camps enough to know the dread significance of that deliberate, drawling, aspirated chant; the lieutenant on shore was taking a part in the morning's work. How coldly and pitilessly – with what an even, calm intonation, presaging and enforcing tranquillity in the men – with what accurately-measured intervals fell those cruel words:

'Attention, company. . . . Shoulder arms. . . . Ready. . . . Aim. . . . Fire.'

Farquhar dived – dived as deeply as he could. The water roared in his ears like the voice of Niagara, yet he heard the dulled thunder of the volley, and rising again towards the surface, met shining bits of metal, singularly flattened, oscillating slowly downward. Some of them touched him on the face and hands, then

fell away, continuing their descent. One lodged between his collar and neck; it was uncomfortably warm, and he snatched it out.

As he rose to the surface, gasping for breath, he saw that he had been a long time under water; he was perceptibly farther down stream – nearer to safety. The soldiers had almost finished reloading; the metal ramrods flashed all at once in the sunshine as they were drawn from the barrels, turned in the air, and thrust into their sockets. The two sentinels fired again, independently and ineffectually.

The hunted man saw all this over his shoulder; he was now swimming vigorously with the current. His brain was as energetic as his arms and legs; he thought with the rapidity of lightning.

‘The officer,’ he reasoned, ‘will not make that martinet’s error a second time. It is as easy to dodge a volley as a single shot. He had probably already given the command to fire at will. God help me, I cannot dodge them all!’

An appalling splash within two yards of him, followed by a loud rushing sound, *diminuendo*, which seemed to travel back through the air to the fort and died in an explosion which stirred the very river to its deeps! A rising sheet of water, which curved over him, fell down upon him, blinded him, strangled him! The cannon had taken a hand in the game. As he shook his head free from the commotion of the smitten water, he heard the deflected shot humming through the air ahead, and in an instant it was cracking and smashing the branches in the forest beyond.

‘They will not do that again,’ he thought; ‘the next time they will use a charge of grape. I must keep my eye upon the gun; the smoke will apprise me – the report arrives too late; it lags behind the missile. It is a good gun.’

Suddenly he felt himself whirled round and round – spinning like a top. The water, the banks, the forest, the now distant bridge, fort and men – all were commingled and blurred. Objects were represented by their colours only; circular horizontal streaks of colour – that was all he saw. He had been caught in a vortex and was being whirled on with a velocity of advance and gyration which made him giddy and sick. In a few moments he was flung upon the gravel at the foot of the left bank of the stream – the southern bank – and behind a projecting point which concealed him from his enemies. The sudden arrest of his motion,

the abrasion of one of his hands on the gravel, restored him and he wept with delight. He dug his fingers into the sand, threw it over himself in handfuls and audibly blessed it. It looked like gold, like diamonds, rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble. The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants: he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms. A strange, roseate light shone through the spaces among the music of aeolian harps. He had no wish to perfect his escape, was content to remain in that enchanting spot until retaken.

A whizz and rattle of grapeshot among the branches high above his head roused him from his dream. The baffled cannoneer had fired him a random farewell. He sprang to his feet, rushed up the sloping bank, and plunged into the forest.

All that day he travelled, laying his course by the rounding sun. The forest seemed interminable, nowhere did he discover a break in it, not even a woodman's road. He had not known that he lived in so wild a region. There was something uncanny in the revelation.

By nightfall he was fatigued, footsore, famishing. The thought of his wife and children urged him on. At last he found a road which led him in what he knew to be the right direction. It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untravelled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the great trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective. Overhead, as he looked up through this rift in the wood, shone great golden stars looking unfamiliar and grouped in strange constellations. He was sure they were arranged in some order which had a secret and malign significance. The wood on either side was full of singular noises, among which – once, twice and again – he distinctly heard whispers in an unknown tongue.

His neck was in pain, and lifting his hand to it, he found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it. His eyes felt congested, he could no longer close them. His tongue was swollen with thirst, he relieved its fever by thrusting it forward from between his teeth into the cool air. How softly the turf had carpeted the untravelled avenue! He

could no longer feel the roadway beneath his feet!

Doubtless, despite his suffering, he fell asleep while walking, for now he sees another scene – perhaps he has merely recovered from delirium. He stands at the gate of his own home. All is as he left it, and all bright and beautiful in the morning sunshine. He must have travelled the entire night. As he pushes open the gate and passes up the wide white walk, he sees a flutter of female garments, his wife, looking fresh and cool and sweet, steps down from the veranda to meet him. At the bottom of the steps she stands waiting, with a smile of ineffable joy, an attitude of matchless grace and dignity. Ah, how beautiful she is! He springs forward with extended arms. As he is about to clasp her, he feels a stunning blow upon the back of his neck, a blinding white light blazes all about him, with a sound like the shock of a cannon – then all is darkness and silence!

Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge.

Computers are one of the major bogies of our time. As someone who works amongst computers for much of my working day, I am particularly conscious of the tremendous part they will come to play in our lives and even in the subsequent evolution of homo sapiens. In the long run I hold their presence to be distinctly beneficial – I believe, for example, that they will emancipate mankind from drudgery, from poverty and, ultimately, from war and strife. En route, however, they will give us some surprises. A hint of these is conveyed in 'Dreams of the Computer' which I have chosen as a special kind of horror story. For those not familiar with the latest developments in computer science some introduction is needed. The story, with the sole exceptions of the statements typed in by myself and which can be identified by a semicolon preceding them, represents the undoctored printout from a time-sharing computer in my own laboratory. What I have done is to 'confuse' the computer by loading program after program into its system without going through the normal procedure of 'program clearance'. The outcome, by the analogy which my colleague, Ted Newman, and I proposed between brains and computers, is that the computer will move into a state roughly comparable to that achieved when a human being has been without sleep or, perhaps more important, dreams for a period of several days. Note that the computer gradually becomes confused, ultimately descending into a state of verbal and logical disarray strongly reminiscent of the disorientation of schizophrenia. The printout is exactly that which my secretary, Jackie Wilson, and I saw following the progressive jamming of the computer's system with an abnormal number of programs. The article, originally published in New Worlds we called 'The Dreams of the Computer'. For the purist, however, these are really not dreams, but hallucinations. For readers who had not realized just how rapidly computer technology is progressing, the subtle horrors of this piece may well be amplified.

The Dreams of the Computer

by Christopher Evans and Jackie Wilson

12IN Ø3/Ø7/69 16:43:11KN COJBAA;JACKIE
MAKING
←COMPUTER DREAM

←;I'M NOW GOING TO LOAD ON A PROGRAM
←LOAD \$TUTORI

TIME SHARING LIMITED. TELCOMP.

TELCOMP IS AN INTERACTIVE SYSTEM BETWEEN
MAN AND MACHINE. IT MAY BE USED AS A
HIGH-SPEED CALCULATING MACHINE OR AS A
STORED COMPUTER. TO USE PURELY FOR
CALCULATIONS, ONE NEED ONLY TO SPELL
OUT THE DIRECT COMMAND 'TYPE' CORRECTLY.
THE BACK ARROW MEANS THAT THE COMPUTER
IS WAITING FOR YOU TO GIVE IT AN
INSTRUCTON

+ MEANS ADD.
- SUBTRACT
* MULTIPLY
/ DIVIDE
↑ RAISE TO THE POWER (I.E. SQUARE,
CUBE ETC.)

PLEASE TYPE OUT THE FOLLOWING, PRESS THE
'RETURN' BUTTON TO 'FEED' THE INSTRUCTION
INTO THE COMPUTER, AND WHEN THE 'BACK
ARROW' RETURNS, TYPE 'GO', AND PRESS THE
'RETURN' BUTTON

YOU TYPE
 'TYPE 11-7, 12+4+6, 2*3, 17/6, 2↑3, 4↑
 (5/2.37)'
 STOPPED AT STEP 1.182
 ←TYPE 11-7, 12+4+6, 2*3, 17/6, 2↑3, 4↑(5/2.37)
 11-7= 4
 12+4+6= 22
 2*3= 6
 17/6= 2.83333333
 2↑3= 8
 4↑(5/2.37)= 18.6281085
 ←; THAT WAS A 'CALCULATION PROGRAMME2'.
 ←; WITHOUT DELETING THIS RPROGRAMME (WHICH
 ←; I OUGHT TO DO) I'M GOING TO LOAD ON
 ←; ANOTHER. THE COMPUTER WILL BEGIN TO
 ←; GET CONFUSED BUT WILL PROBABLY CARRY
 ←; ON OK. BUT THEN, WITHOUT LETTING
 ←; IT CLEAR THE OLD PROGRAMMES OUT I'M
 ←; GOING TO LOAD ON ANOTHER, AND THNN
 ←; ANOTHER. BEFORE LONG, THUS DEPRIED
 ←; OF ITS SLEEP (OR MORE ACCURATELY ITS
 ←; DREAMS) IT WILL BEGIN TO HALLUCIAATE
 ←; AND ODD THINGS SHOULD HAPPEN.
 LOAD TRUTH\\\\\\ \$TRUTH

```

*****
* 1. THERE ARE THREE NUMBERED *
* STATEMENTS IN THIS BOX.      *
*                                *
* 2. TWO OF THEM ARE FALSE.    *
*                                *
* 3. JULIE ANDREWS WAS A       *
* STAR IN 'MY FAIR LADY'       *
*                                *
*****

```

HOW MANY OF THESE STATEMENTS ARE FALSE?

NUM = ONE

ERROR AT STEP 11.43

ONE

IS UNDEFINED

←GO

NUM = 1

WHICH?

NUM = 3

SO #2 IS TRUE?

ANS = YES

DO YOU SEE A CONTRADICTION?

ANS = NO

YOU CLAIM ONE FALSE, BUT #2 SAYS TWO.
HOW MANY OF THESE STATEMENTS ARE FALSE?

NUM = 1

WHICH?

NUM = 1

#1 IS CLEARLY TRUE.

HOW MANY OF THESE STATEMENTS ARE FALSE?

NUM = 1

WHICH?

NUM = 2

GOOD!

INCIDENTALLY THIS IS NOT A PARADOX.

STOPPED AT STEP 13.8

←LOAD \$HSCOPE

TELCOMP IS AN INTERACTIVE SYSTEM BETWEEN MAN AND MACHINE. IT MAY BE USED AS A HIGH-SPEED CALCULATING MACHINE OR AS A STORED COMPUTER. TO USE PURELY FOR CALCULATIONS, ONE NEED ONLY TO SPELL OUT THE DIRECT COMMAND 'TYPE' CORRECTLY. THE BACK ARROW MEANS THAT THE COMPUTER IS WAITING FOR YOU TO GIVE IT AN INSTRUCTION.

+ MEANS ADD.

- SUBTRACT

* MULTIPLY

/ DIVIDE

↑ RAISE TO THE POWER (I.E. SQUARE , CUBE ETC.)

PLEASE TYPE OUT THE FOLLOWING, PRESS THE 'RETURN' BUTTON TO 'FEED' THE INSTRUCTION INTO THE COMPUTER, AND WHEN THE 'BACK ARROW' RETURNS, TYPE 'GO', AND PRESS THE 'RETURN' BUTTON

YOU TYPE 'TYPE 11-7, 12+4+6, 2*3, 17/6,

2↑3, 4↑(5/2.37)'

STOPPED AT STEP 1.182

←GO

80% OF THE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED WHEN WRITING A PROGRAM ARE PURELY TYPOGRAPHICAL--- EITHER YOU MIS-TYPE SOMETHING OR YOU LEAVE SOMETHING OUT. AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TELCOMP HELPS YOU TO QUICKLY SEE THE MISTAKE YOU HAVE MADE IS OBTAINED WHEN YOU PURPOSELY

AND SWAYED BY #####, MODIFIED BY #####'S SPHERE.

TYPE THE FOLLOWING: TYPE 11-7
NOW YOU TRY IT, DON'T FORGET TO PUSH
THE 'RETURN'

TYPE 'GO' WHEN THE '←' RETURNS.
STOPPED AT STEP 1.18996

←GO

ANOTHER USEFUL INSTRUCTION IS 'SET'
THIS IS USED TO DEFINE VARIABLES, AND
STORE THEM IN THE COMPUTER'S STORE.
A SIMPLE EXAMPLE OF ITS USE IS
INTERRUPTED AT STEP 1.194

←; WHERE'S THE HOSROSCOPE PROGRAMME I
TYPED ON?

←LOAD \$HSCOPE

TELCOMP IS AN INTERACTI\VE SYSTEM
BETWEEN MAN AND MACHINE.
INTERRUPTED AT STEP 1.13

←LOAD

RUBOUT

←; TELCOMP IS BEGINNING TO GET CONFUSED

←LOAD \$EXPENS

THIS IS A PROGRAM TO CALCULATE YOUR
EXPENSES FOR THE WEEK

ARE YOU RECOMPENSED FOR THE USE OF YOUR
CAR FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES (ANS. YES OR
NO THEN PRESS RETURN KEY)

ANS=YES

PLEASE ENTER RATE PER MILE IN PENCE
RTE=20

LUCKY DEVIL ! THATS MORE THAN WE GET

NOW HOW MANY MILES ARE YOU HOPING TO GET
AWAY WITH THIS WEEK

MIL=500

E YOU TRAVELLED BY ANY OTHER MEANS
THIS WEEK (ON BUSINESS OF COURSE)?

ANS=YES

PLEASE ENTER TOTAL COST (YOU WILL BE
ASKED FOR POUNDS, (PDS), SHILLINGS (SHI)
AND PENCE (PEN) ON SEPERATE LINES.
AFTER TYPING EACH VALUE PRESS RETURN KEY

PDS=2

SHI=14

PEN=2

DO YOU HAVE ANY HOTEL EXPENSES TO CLAIM?
(ONE SINGLE ROOM ONLY)

ANS=YES

PLEASE ENTER THE AMOUNT ON THE BILL PLUS
TIPS.

PDS=3

SHI=15

PEN=0

DO YOU HAVE ANY CHARGABLE ENTERTAINMENT
EXPENSES

ANS=NO

DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER EXPENSES?

ANS=NO

DEAR BOSS,

7/ 3/69

HERE IS MY EXPENSE ACCOUNT FOR
LAST WEEK.

CAR EXPENSES 500 MILES AT 20.0

PENCE PER MILE

41-13-4

ALL OTHER TRAVELLING EXPENSES

2-14-2

HOTEL EXPENSES (INCLUDING TIPS)

3-15-0

ENTERTAINING EXPENSES (INCLUDING TIPS)	0-0-0
ALL OTHER EXPENSES	0-0-0
TOTAL	48- 2-6

YOURS FAITHFULLY

DO YOU WISH TO REPEAT THE CALCULATION

ANS=NO

ERROR AT STEP 21.1

NOT ENOUGH VALUES FOR THAT FORM

←; THE COMPUTER IS GETTING VERY CONFUSED
←LOAD \$HSCOPE

TELCOMP IS AN INTERACTIVE SYSTEM BETWEEN
MAN AND MACHINE.X\
INTERRUPTED AT STEP 1.13

←LOAD \$DAY

ALL DATES REFER TO THE GREGORIAN CALENDAR

TELCOMP IS AN INTERACTIVE SYSTEM BETWEEN
MAN AND MACHINE.

WHAT YEAR (NEGATIVE IF BC)?

YR=L93

RUBOUT

YR=1931

- SUBTRACT

* MULTIPLY

/ DIVIDE

↑ RAISE TO THE POWER (I.E. SQUARE ,
CUBE ETC.)

PLEASE TYPE OUT THE FOLLOWING, PRESS THE
'RETURN' BUTTON TYPE A*B*C/(C-A-6)

GO

STOPPED AT STEP 1.2125

←LOAD \$GAME 31

ONLY ONE FILE PER LOAD COMMAND

←LOAD \$GAME31

THE GAME OF 31 USES THE ACES (VALUE OF ONE) THROUGH SIXES OF A DECK OF CARDS. THE OBJECT IS TO PILE CARDS UNTIL THE SUM OF THE CARDS IS 31. YOU GO FIRST, AND THEN WE WILL ALTERNATE UNTIL 31 IS REACHED. THE PERSON WHO REACHES 31 WINS.

ERROR AT STEP 22.01

TOO MANY VALUES FOR THAT FORM

←GO

ERROR AT STEP 22.01

TOO MANY VALUES FOR THAT FORM

←DO PART 22.1

.....
DO YOU WISH TO REPEAT THE CALCULATION

ANS=NO

←LOAD \$GUESS

THIS IS A GUESSING GAME IN WHICH I TRY TO GUESS WHAT ANIMAL YOU ARE THINKING OF

ARE YOU THINKING OF AN ANIMAL?

ANSWER=NO

PLEASE ANSWER YES OR NO

ANSWER=YES

FOR AN ACCURATE HOROSCOPE GIVE THE YEAR OF YOUR BIRTH (E.G. AS 1931) OR ELSE REPLY NO

DOES IT LIVE IN WATER?

ANSWER=NO

ERROR AT STEP 1.45

ARGUMENTS TO LOGICAL OPERATORS MUST BE COMPARISONS

←GO

ERROR AT STEP 1.45

←DO PART 1.46

PLEASE ANSWER YES OR NO

ANSWER=YES

IS IT MORE THAN A FOOT LONG?

ANSWER = YES

DOES IT SPOUT?

ANSWER = YES

MY GUESS IS A WHALE!. IS THAT RIGHT?

ANSWER = YES

LET'S TRY AGAIN.

TYPE A*B*C/(C-A-6)

GO

STOPPED AT STEP 1.2125

←DO PART 1.3

ARE YOU THINKING OF AN ANIMAL?

ANSWER = YES

FOR AN ACCURATE HOROSCOPE GIVE THE YEAR
OF YOUR BIRTH (E.G. AS 1931) OR ELSE
REPLY NO

DOES IT LIVE IN WATER?

ANSWER = NO

ERROR AT STEP 1.45

ARGUMENTS TO LOGICAL OPERATORS MUST BE
COMPARISONS

←LOAD \$LETTER

THIS IS A GUESSING GAME IN WHICH I TRY
TO GUESS WHAT ANIMAL YOU ARE THINKING OF
TYPE YOUR LETTER NOW

(IGNORE THE BACK ARROW)

PLEASE ANSWER YES OR NO

(IGNORE THE BACK ARROW)

PLEASE ANSWER YES OR NO

(IGNORE THE BACK ARROW)

PLEASE ANSWER YES OR NO

(IGNORE THE BACK ARROW)

PLEASE ANSWER YES OR NO

P\ (IGNORE THE BACK ARROW)
 \PLEASE ANSWER YES OR NO
 INTERRUPTED AT STEP 1.24
 ←DO PART 1.3
 ERROR AT STEP 1.3
 LINES IS UNDEFINED
 ←LINES = FOOT
 FOOT IS UNDEFINED
 ←WHAT IS FOOT?
 ILLEGAL CHARACTER IN THE LINE
 ←DO PART 1.4
 HOW MANY COPIES WOULD YOU LIKE? DOES IT
 LIVE IN WATER?
 ANSWER=NO
 ERROR AT STEP 1.45
 ARGUMENTS TO LOGICAL OPERATORS MUST BE
 COMPARISONS
 ←GO
 ERROR AT STEP 1.45
 ARGUMENTS TO LOGICAL OPERATORS MUST BE
 COMPARISONS
 ←2
 ←LINES = 5
 ←DO PART 1.4
 HOW MANY COPIES WOULD YOU LIKE? DOES
 IT LIVE IN WATER?
 ANSWER=5
 ERROR AT STEP 1.45
 ARGUMENTS TO LOGICAL OPERATORS MUST BE
 COMPARISONS
 ←LOAD \$OANDX1; PLAY NOGUHTS AND CROSSES
 WITH ME
 RLAMISOLETS BAYDSSRY SEGAEWINHMECH
 I TRY TO GUESS
 WHAT ANIMAL YOU ARE THINKING OF
 TYPE YOUR LETTER NOW
 (IGNORE THE BACK ARROW)
 PLA=

```

ERROR AT STEP 1.25
THERE'S SOMETHING MISSING
←DO PART 1.3
  ERROR AT STEP 1.3
    G                                IS UNDEFINED
←G = 100
←GO
  ERROR AT STEP 1.3
    TOT                            IS UNDEFINED
←LOAD $APOLLO

```

NTROL CALLING LUNAR MODULE. YOU ARE ON SCHEDULED VERTICAL LANDING COURSE, BUT AUTO LANDING CONTROL SYSTEM IS OUT. YOU MUST LAND ON MANUAL CONTROL. YOU WILL HAVE ALTITUDE CHECKS EACH TEN SECONDS, AND YOU MAY THEN RESET THE RETRO ROCKET FUEL RATE K FOR THE NEXT INTERVAL TO Ø OR ANY VALUE BETWEEN 8 AND 200 LBS/SEC SECOND. YOU HAVE 16000 LBS OF FUEL. YOUR ESTIMATED FREE FALL IMPACT TIME IS 120 SECS AFTER FIRST CHECK

FIRST RADAR CHECK COMING UP

COMMENCE LANDING PROCEDURE
TIME, SFCS ALTITUDE, MILES+FEET VELOCITY,
MPH FUEL, LBS
FUEL RATE
THE ANSWER SHOULD BE YES OR NO
SECOND. YOU HAVE 16000 LBS OF FUEL. YOUR
ESTIMATED FREE FALL IMPACT TIME IS 120
SECS AFTER FIRST CHECK

FIRST RADAR CHECK COMING UP

COMPOSES LAND IN FUBRO WIDE DEEFET
VELOCITY, MPH FUEL, LBS
FUEL RATE

THE ANSWER SHOULD BE YES OR NO
| SECOND. YOU HAVE 16000 LBS OF FUEL.
YOUR ESTIMATED
INTERRUPTED AT STEP 1.1

←DO PART 1.6
ERROR AT STEP 1.6
VØ IS UNDEFINED

←LOAD \$GUESS
THIS IS A GUESSING GAME IN WHICH I TRY
TO GUESS WHAT ANIMAL YOU ARE THINKING OF

ARE YOU THINKING OF AN ANIMAL?

ANSWER=YES
FOR AN ACCURATE HOROSCOPE GIVE THE YEAR
OF YOUR BIRTH (E.G. AS 1931) OR ELSE
REPLY NO
DOES IT LIVE IN WATER?

ANSWER=NO
ERROR AT STEP 1.45
ARGUMENTS TO LOGICAL OPERATORS MUST BE
COMPARISONS
←DO PART 1.46

PLEASE ANSWER YES OR NO

ANSWER=NO
ERROR AT STEP 1.45
ARGUMENTS TO LOGICAL OPERATORS MUST BE
COMPARISONS

←DO PART 3
A SHEEPA DINOSAURA BATA THRUSHAN
ELEPHANTA MAMMOTHAN OSTRICHA LADYBIRD
INTERRUPTED AT STEP 3.011

←DO PART 2
IS IT EXTINCT?
DOES IT FLY?
HAS IT GOT A TRUNK?
HAS IT GOT A TRUNK?
IS IT A REPTILE?
IS IT RED?
DOES IT LAY EGGS?

DOES IT LIVE IN WATER?
DOES IT FLY?
DOES IT SWIM?
HAS IT GOT HORNS?
IS IT MORE THAN A FOOT LONG?
HAS IT GOT HARD FEET?
HAS IT GOT A CURLY TAIL?
DOES IT LIKE THE COLD?
HAS IT GOT A TRUNK?
DOES IT SWIM?
DOES IT SWIM?
DOES IT WRIGGLE?
HAS IT GOT FUR?
HAS IT GOT TWO LEGS?
DOES IT BARK
DOES IT FLY?
HAS IT GOT SPOTS?
DOES IT LIKE CHEESE
DOES IT LIVE IN A BURROW
HAS IT GOT A LONG TAIL?
HAS IT GOT A BUSHY TAIL?
DOES IT SPOUT?
DOES IT LAY EGGS?
DOES IT FLY?

NO GOOD
ERROR OBVIOUS TO THE MEANEST INTELLIGENCE
NO GOOD
ERROR OBVIOUS TO THE MEANEST INTELLIGENCE
NO GOOD
ERROR OBVIOUS TO THE MEANEST INTELLIGENCE
NO GOOD
ERROR OBVIOUS TO THE MEANEST INTELLIGENC
000\|E

Any anthology which attempts to cover the major contact points between the horrific and the normal, the grey territory where internal and external realities become confused, needs, inevitably, to include a variant on the theme of Hell. Today we seem to have largely done away with the idea that on our death we will be cast into some boiling pit or, alternatively, find ourselves coasting along on a hydrolastic cloud. The real punishments for misdemeanors, we hold, come during life, not after it. (That some people are consistently sinful and yet get away with it is one of the grave injustices of the system.) But the potency of the idea of Hell was very considerable once and it still influences modern thought and to some extent modern mores, and for this reason speculation about the form an ultra-modern Hell might take still promotes a real degree of unease. In 'Where Their Fire is Not Quenched', May Sinclair hypothesises a hell of seedy hotel rooms, populated by the souls of former lovers, forced to re-dramatize their stale passions for all eternity. It is a cunning and convincing variation on a well-tried theme.

Where Their Fire is not Quenched

by May Sinclair

There was nobody in the orchard. Harriott Leigh went out, carefully, through the iron gate into the field. She had made the latch slip into its notch without a sound.

The path slanted widely up the field from the orchard gate to the stile under the elder tree. George Waring waited for her there.

Years afterwards, when she thought of George Waring she smelt the sweet, hot, wine-scent of the elder flowers. Years afterwards, when she smelt the elder flowers she saw George Waring, with his beautiful, gentle face, like a poet's or a musician's, his black-blue eyes, and sleek, olive-brown hair. He was a naval lieutenant.

Yesterday he had asked her to marry him and she had consented. But her father hadn't, and she had come to tell him that

and say good-bye before he left her. His ship was to sail the next day.

He was eager and excited. He couldn't believe that anything could stop their happiness, that anything he didn't want to happen could happen.

'Well?' he said.

'He's a perfect beast, George. He won't let us. He says we're too young.'

'I was twenty last August,' he said, aggrieved.

'And I shall be seventeen in September.'

'And this is June. We're quite old, really. How long does he want us to wait?'

'Three years.'

'Three years before we can be engaged even - Why, we might be dead.'

She put her arms round him to make him feel safe. They kissed; and the sweet, hot, wine-scent of the elder flowers mixed with their kisses. They stood, pressed close together, under the elder tree.

Across the yellow fields of charlock they heard the village clock strike seven. Up in the house a gong clanged.

'Darling, I must go,' she said.

'Oh, stay - Stay *five* minutes.'

He pressed her close. It lasted five minutes, and five more. Then he was running fast down the road to the station, while Harriott went along the field-path, slowly, struggling with her tears.

'He'll be back in three months,' she said. 'I can live through three months.'

But he never came back. There was something wrong with the engines of his ship, the *Alexandra*. Three weeks later she went down in the Mediterranean, and George with her.

Harriott said she didn't care how soon she died now. She was quite sure it would be soon, because she couldn't live without him.

Five years passed.

The two lines of beech trees stretched on and on, the whole length of the Park, a broad green drive between. When you came to the middle they branched off right and left in the form of a cross, and at the end of the right arm there was a white stucco

pavilion with pillars and a three-cornered pediment like a Greek temple. At the end of the left arm, the west entrance to the Park, double gates and a side door.

Harriott, on her stone seat at the back of the pavilion, could see Stephen Philpotts the very minute he came through the side door.

He had asked her to wait for him there. It was the place he always chose to read his poems aloud in. The poems were a pretext. She knew what he was going to say. And she knew what she would answer.

There were elder bushes in flower at the back of the pavilion, and Harriott thought of George Waring. She told herself that George was nearer to her now than he could ever have been, living. If she married Stephen she would not be unfaithful, because she loved him with another part of herself. It was not as though Stephen were taking George's place. She loved Stephen with her soul, in an unearthly way.

But her body quivered like a stretched wire when the door opened and the young man came towards her down the drive under the beech trees.

She loved him; she loved his slenderness, his darkness and sallow whiteness, his black eyes lighting up with the intellectual flame, the way his black hair swept back from his forehead, the way he walked, tiptoe, as if his feet were lifted with wings.

He sat down beside her. She could see his hands tremble. She felt that her moment was coming; it had come.

'I wanted to see you alone because there's something I must say to you. I don't quite know how to begin. . . .'

Her lips parted. She panted lightly.

'You've heard me speak of Sybill Foster?'

Her voice came stammering, 'N-no, Stephen. Did you?'

'Well, I didn't mean to, till I knew it was all right. I only heard yesterday.'

'Heard what?'

'Why, that she'll have me. Oh, Harriott - do you know what it's like to be terribly happy?'

She knew. She had known just now, the moment before he told her. She sat there, stone-cold and stiff, listening to his raptures, listening to her own voice saying she was glad.

Ten years passed.

Harriott Leigh sat waiting in the drawing-room of a small house in Maida Vale. She had lived there ever since her father's death two years before.

She was restless. She kept on looking at the clock to see if it was four, the hour that Oscar Wade had appointed. She was not sure that he would come, after she had sent him away yesterday.

She now asked herself, why, when she had sent him away yesterday, she had let him come today. Her motives were not altogether clear. If she really meant what she had said then, she oughtn't to let him come to her again. Never again.

She had shown him plainly what she meant. She could see herself, sitting very straight in her chair, uplifted by a passionate integrity, while he stood before her, hanging his head, ashamed and beaten; she could feel again the throb in her voice as she kept on saying that she couldn't, she couldn't; he must see that she couldn't; that no, nothing would make her change her mind; she couldn't forget he had a wife; that he must think of Muriel.

To which he had answered savagely: 'I needn't. That's all over. We only live together for the look of the thing.'

And she, serenely, with great dignity: 'And for the look of the thing, Oscar, we must leave off seeing each other. Please go.'

'Do you mean it?'

'Yes. We must never see each other again.'

And he had gone then, ashamed and beaten.

She could see him, squaring his broad shoulders to meet the blow. And she was sorry for him. She told herself she had been unnecessarily hard. Why shouldn't they see each other again, now he understood where they must draw the line? Until yesterday the line had never been very clearly drawn. Today she meant to ask him to forget what he had said to her. Once it was forgotten, they could go on being friends as if nothing had happened.

It was four o'clock. Half-past. Five. She had finished tea and given him up when, between the half-hour and six o'clock, he came.

He came as he had come a dozen times, with his measured, deliberate, thoughtful tread, carrying himself well braced, with a sort of held-in arrogance, his great shoulders heaving. He was a man of about forty, broad and tall, lean-flanked and short-necked, his straight, handsome features showing small and even

in the big square face and in the flush that swamped it. The close-clipped, reddish-brown moustache bristled forwards from the pushed-out upper lip. His small, flat eyes shone, reddish-brown, eager and animal.

She liked to think of him when he was not there, but always at the first sight of him she felt a slight shock. Physically, he was very far from her admired ideal. So different from George Waring and Stephen Philpotts.

He sat down, facing her.

There was an embarrassed silence, broken by Oscar Wade.

'Well, Harriott, you said I could come.' He seemed to be throwing the responsibility on her.

'Oh yes, Oscar, I've forgiven you.'

He said she'd better show it by coming to dine with him somewhere that evening.

She could give no reason to herself for going. She simply went.

He took her to a restaurant in Soho. Oscar Wade dined well, even extravagantly, giving each dish its importance. She liked his extravagance. He had none of the mean virtues.

It was over. His flushed, embarrassed silence told her what he was thinking. But when he had seen her home, he left her at her garden gate. He had thought better of it.

She was not sure whether she were glad or sorry. She had had her moment of righteous exaltation and she had enjoyed it. But there was no joy in the weeks that followed it. She had given up Oscar Wade because she didn't want him very much; and now she wanted him furiously, perversely, because she had given him up. Though he had no resemblance to her ideal, she couldn't live without him.

She dined with him again and again, till she knew Schnebler's Restaurant by heart, the white panelled walls picked out with gold; the white pillars, and the curling gold fronds of their capitals; the Turkey carpets, blue and crimson, soft under her feet; the thick crimson velvet cushions, that clung to her skirts; the glitter of silver and glass on the innumerable white circles of the tables. And the faces of the diners, red, white, pink, brown, grey, and sallow, distorted and excited; the curled mouths that twisted as they ate; the convoluted electric bulbs pointing, pointing down at them, under the red, crinkled shades. All shimmering

in a thick air that the red light stained as wine stains water.

And Oscar's face, flushed with his dinner. Always, when he leaned back from the table and brooded in silence she knew what he was thinking. His heavy eyelids would lift; she would find his eyes fixed on hers, wondering, considering.

She knew now what the end would be. She thought of George Waring and Stephen Philpotts, and of her life, cheated. She hadn't chosen Oscar, she hadn't really wanted him; but now he had forced himself on her she couldn't afford to let him go. Since George died no man had loved her, no other man ever would. And she was sorry for him when she thought of him going from her, beaten and ashamed.

She was certain, before he was, of the end. Only she didn't know when and where and how it would come. That was what Oscar knew.

It came at the close of one of their evenings when they had dined in a private sitting-room. He said he couldn't stand the heat and noise of the public restaurant.

She went before him, up a steep, red-carpeted stair to a white door on the second landing.

From time to time they repeated the furtive, hidden adventure. Sometimes she met him in the room above Schnebler's. Sometimes, when her maid was out, she received him at her house in Maida Vale. But that was dangerous, not to be risked too often.

Oscar declared himself unspeakably happy. Harriott was not quite sure. This was love, the thing she had never had, that she had dreamed of, hungered and thirsted for; but now she had it she was not satisfied. Always she looked for something just beyond it, some mystic, heavenly rapture always beginning to come, that never came. There was something about Oscar that repelled her. But because she had taken him for her lover, she couldn't bring herself to admit that it was a certain coarseness. She looked another way and pretended it wasn't there. To justify herself, she fixed her mind on his good qualities, his generosity, his strength, the way he had built up his engineering business. She made him take her over his works; and show her his great dynamos. She made him lend her the books he read. But always, when she tried to talk to him, he let her see that *that* wasn't what she was there for.

'My dear girl, we haven't time,' he said. 'It's waste of our priceless moments.'

She persisted. 'There's something wrong about it all if we can't talk to each other.'

He was irritated. 'Women never seem to consider that a man can get all the talk he wants from other men. What's wrong is our meeting in this unsatisfactory way. We ought to live together. It's the only sane thing. I would, only I don't want to break up Muriel's home and make her miserable.'

'I thought you said she wouldn't care.'

'My dear, she cares for her home and her position and the children. You forget the children.'

Yes. She had forgotten the children. She had forgotten Muriel. She had left off thinking of Oscar as a man with a wife and children and a home.

He had a plan. His mother-in-law was coming to stay with Muriel in October and he would get away. He would go to Paris, and Harriott should come to him there. He could say he went on business. No need to lie about it; he *had* business in Paris.

He engaged rooms in an hotel in the rue de Rivoli. They spent two weeks there.

For three days Oscar was madly in love with Harriott and Harriott with him. As she lay awake she would turn on the light and look at him as he slept at her side. Sleep made him beautiful and innocent; it laid a fine, smooth tissue over his coarseness; it made his mouth gentle; it entirely hid his eyes.

In six days reaction had set in. At the end of the tenth day, Harriott, returning with Oscar from Montmartre, burst into a fit of crying. When questioned, she answered wildly that the Hotel Saint Pierre was too hideously ugly; it was getting on her nerves. Mercifully Oscar explained her state as fatigue following excitement. She tried hard to believe that she was miserable because her love was purer and more spiritual than Oscar's; but all the time she knew perfectly well she had cried from pure boredom. She was in love with Oscar, and Oscar bored her. Oscar was in love with her, and she bored him. At close quarters, day in and day out, each was revealed to the other as an incredible bore.

At the end of the second week she began to doubt whether she had ever been really in love with him.

Her passion returned for a little while after they got back to London. Freed from the unnatural strain which Paris had put on them, they persuaded themselves that their romantic temperaments were better fitted to the old life of casual adventure.

Then, gradually, the sense of danger began to wake in them. They lived in perpetual fear, face to face with all the chances of discovery. They tormented themselves and each other by imagining possibilities that they would never have considered in their first fine moments. It was as though they were beginning to ask themselves if it were, after all, worth while running such awful risks, for all they got out of it. Oscar still swore that if he had been free he would have married her. He pointed out that his intentions at any rate were regular. But she asked herself: Would I marry *him*? Marriage would be the Hotel Saint Pierre all over again, without any possibility of escape. But, if she wouldn't marry him, was she in love with him? That was the test. Perhaps it was a good thing he wasn't free. Then she told herself that these doubts were morbid, and that the question wouldn't arise.

One evening Oscar called to see her. He had come to tell her that Muriel was ill.

'Seriously ill?'

'I'm afraid so. It's pleurisy. May turn to pneumonia. We shall know one way or another in the next few days.'

A terrible fear seized upon Harriott. Muriel might die of her pleurisy; and if Muriel died, she would have to marry Oscar. He was looking at her queerly, as if he knew what she was thinking and she could see that the same thought had occurred to him and that he was frightened too.

Muriel got well again; but their danger had enlightened them. Muriel's life was now inconceivably precious to them both; she stood between them and that permanent union, which they dreaded and yet would not have the courage to refuse.

After enlightenment the rupture.

It came from Oscar, one evening when he sat with her in her drawing-room.

'Harriott,' he said, 'do you know I'm thinking seriously of settling down?'

'How do you mean, settling down?'

'Patching it up with Muriel, poor girl. . . . Has it never oc-

curred to you that this little affair of ours can't go on for ever?'

'You don't want it to go on?'

'I don't want to have any humbug about it. For God's sake, let's be straight. If it's done, it's done. Let's end it decently.'

'I see. You want to get rid of me.'

'That's a beastly way of putting it.'

'Is there any way that isn't beastly? The whole thing's beastly. I should have thought you'd have stuck to it now you've made it what you wanted. When I haven't an ideal, I haven't a single illusion, when you've destroyed everything you didn't want.'

'What didn't I want?'

'The clean, beautiful part of it. The part I wanted.'

'My part at least was real. It was cleaner and more beautiful than all that putrid stuff you wrapped it up in. You were a hypocrite, Harriott, and I wasn't. You're a hypocrite now if you say you weren't happy with me.'

'I was never really happy. Never for one moment. There was always something I missed. Something you didn't give me. Perhaps you couldn't.'

'No. I wasn't spiritual enough,' he sneered.

'You were not. And you made me what you were.'

'Oh, I noticed that you were always very spiritual *after* you'd got what you wanted.'

'What I wanted?' she cried. 'Oh, my God—'

'If you ever knew what you wanted.'

'What — I — wanted,' she repeated, drawing out her bitterness.

'Come,' he said, 'why not be honest? Face facts. I was awfully gone on you. You were awfully gone on me — once. We got tired of each other and it's over. But at least you might own we had a good time while it lasted.'

'A good time?'

'Good enough for me.'

'For you, because for you love only means one thing. Everything that's high and noble in it you dragged down to that, till there's nothing left for us but that. *That's* what you made of love.'

Twenty years passed.

It was Oscar who died first, three years after the rupture. He

did it suddenly one evening, falling down in a fit of apoplexy.

His death was an immense relief to Harriott. Perfect security had been impossible as long as he was alive. But now there wasn't a living soul who knew her secret.

Still, in the first moment of shock Harriott told herself that Oscar dead would be nearer to her than ever. She forgot how little she had wanted him to be near her, alive. And long before the twenty years had passed she had contrived to persuade herself that he had never been near to her at all. It was incredible that she had ever known such a person as Oscar Wade. As for their affair, she couldn't think of Harriott Leigh as the sort of woman to whom such a thing could happen. Schnebler's and the Hotel Saint Pierre ceased to figure among prominent images of her past. Her memories, if she had allowed herself to remember, would have clashed disagreeably with the reputation for sanctity which she had now acquired.

For Harriott at fifty-two was the friend and helper of the Reverend Clement Farmer, Vicar of St. Mary the Virgin's, Maida Vale. She worked as a deaconess in his parish, wearing the uniform of a deaconess, the semi-religious gown, the cloak, the bonnet and veil, the cross and rosary, the holy smile. She was also secretary to the Maida Vale and Kilburn Home for Fallen Girls.

Her moments of excitement came when Clement Farmer, the lean, austere likeness of Stephen Philpotts, in his cassock and lace-bordered surplice, issued from the vestry, when he mounted the pulpit, when he stood before the altar rails and lifted up his arms in Benediction; her moments of ecstasy when she received the Sacrament from his hands. And she had moments of calm happiness when his study door closed on their communion. All these moments were saturated with a solemn holiness.

And they were insignificant compared with the moment of her dying.

She lay dozing in her white bed under the black crucifix with the ivory Christ. The basins and medicine bottles had been cleared from the table by her pillow; it was spread for the last rites. The priest moved quietly about the room, arranging the candles, the Prayer Book and the Holy Sacrament. Then he drew a chair to her bedside and watched her, waiting for her to come up out of her doze.

She woke suddenly. Her eyes were fixed upon him. She had a flash of lucidity. She was dying, and her dying made her supremely important to Clement Farmer.

'Are you ready?' he asked.

'Not yet. I think I'm afraid. Make me not afraid.'

He rose and lit the two candles on the altar. He took down the crucifix from the wall and stood it against the footrail of the bed.

She sighed. That was not what she had wanted.

'You will not be afraid now,' he said.

'I'm not afraid of the hereafter. I suppose you get used to it. Only it may be terrible just at first.'

'Our first state will depend very much on what we are thinking of at our last hour.'

'There'll be my - confession,' she said.

'And after it you will receive the Sacrament. Then you will have your mind fixed firmly upon God and your Redeemer. . . . Do you feel able to make your confession now, Sister? Everything is ready.'

Her mind went back over her past and found Oscar Wade there. She wondered: Should she confess to him about Oscar Wade? One moment she thought it was possible; the next she knew that she couldn't. She could not. It wasn't necessary. For twenty years he had not been part of her life. No. She wouldn't confess about Oscar Wade. She had been guilty of other sins.

She made a careful selection.

'I have cared too much for the beauty of this world. . . . I have failed in charity to my poor girls. Because of my intense repugnance to their sin. . . . I have thought, often, about - people I love, when I should have been thinking about God.'

After that she received the Sacrament.

'Now,' he said, 'there is nothing to be afraid of.'

'I won't be afraid if - if you would hold my hand.'

He held it. And she lay still a long time, with her eyes shut. Then he heard her murmuring something. He stooped close.

'This - is - dying. I thought it would be horrible. And it's bliss. . . . Bliss.'

The priest's hand slackened, as if at the bidding of some wonder. She gave a weak cry.

'Oh - don't let me go.'

His grasp tightened.

'Try,' he said, 'to think about God. Keep on looking at the crucifix.'

'If I look,' she whispered, 'you won't let go my hand?'

'I will not let you go.'

He held it till it was wrenched from him in the last agony.

She lingered for some hours in the room where these things had happened.

Its aspects were familiar and yet unfamiliar, and slightly repugnant to her. The altar, the crucifix, the lighted candles, suggested some tremendous and awful experience the details of which she was not able to recall. She seemed to remember that they had been connected in some way with the sheeted body on the bed; but the nature of the connection was not clear; and she did not associate the dead body with herself. When the nurse came in and laid it out, she saw that it was the body of a middle-aged woman. Her own living body was that of a young woman of about thirty-two.

Her mind had no past and no future, no sharp-edged, coherent memories, and no idea of anything to be done next.

Then, suddenly, the room began to come apart before her eyes, to split into shafts of floor and furniture and ceiling that shifted and were thrown by their commotion into different planes. They leaned slanting at every possible angle; they crossed and overlaid each other with a transparent mingling of dislocated perspectives; like reflections fallen on an interior seen behind glass.

The bed and the sheeted body slid away somewhere out of sight. She was standing by the door that still remained in position.

She opened it and found herself in the street, outside a building of yellowish-grey brick and freestone, with a tall slated spire. Her mind came together with a palpable click of recognition. This object was the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Maida Vale. She could hear the droning of the organ. She opened the door and slipped in.

She had gone back into a definite space and time, and recovered a certain limited section of coherent memory. She remembered the rows of pitch-pine benches, with their Gothic peaks

and mouldings; the stone-coloured walls and pillars with their chocolate stencilling; the hanging rings of lights along the aisles of the nave; the high altar with its lighted candles, and the polished brass cross, twinkling. These things were somehow permanent and real, adjusted to the image that now took possession of her.

She knew what she had come there for. The service was over. The choir had gone from the chancel; the sacristan moved before the altar, putting out the candles. She walked up the middle aisle to a seat that she knew under the pulpit. She knelt down and covered her face with her hands. Peeping sideways through her fingers, she could see the door of the vestry on her left at the end of the north aisle. She watched it steadily.

Up in the organ loft the organist drew out the Recessional, slowly and softly, at its end in the two solemn, vibrating chords.

The vestry door opened and Clement Farmer came out, dressed in his black cassock. He passed before her, close, close outside the bench where she knelt. He paused at the opening. He was waiting for her. There was something he had to say.

She stood up and went towards him. He still waited. He didn't move to make way for her. She came close, closer than she had ever come to him, so close that his features grew indistinct. She bent her head back, peering short-sightedly and found herself looking into Oscar Wade's face.

He stood still, horribly still, and close, barring her passage.

She drew back; his heaving shoulders followed her. He leaned forward, covering her with his eyes. She opened her mouth to scream and no sound came.

She was afraid to move lest he should move with her. The heaving of his shoulders terrified her.

One by one the lights in the side aisles were going out. The lights in the middle aisle would go next. They had gone. If she didn't get away she would be shut up with him there, in the appalling darkness.

She turned and moved towards the north aisle, groping, steadying herself by the book ledge.

When she looked back, Oscar Wade was not there.

Then she remembered that Oscar Wade was dead. Therefore, what she had seen was not Oscar; it was his ghost. He was dead;

dead seventeen years ago. She was safe from him for ever.

When she came on to the steps of the church she saw that the road it stood in had changed. It was not the road she remembered. The pavement on this side was raised slightly and covered in. It ran under a succession of arches. It was a long gallery walled with glittering shop windows on one side; on the other a line of tall grey columns divided it from the street.

She was going along the arcades of the rue de Rivoli. Ahead of her she could see the edge of an immense grey pillar jutting out. That was the porch of the Hotel Saint Pierre. The revolving glass door swung forward to receive her; she crossed the grey, sultry vestibule under the pillared arches. She knew it. She knew the porter's shining, wine-coloured, mahogany pen on her left, and the shining, wine-coloured, mahogany barrier of the clerk's bureau on her right; she made straight for the great grey carpeted staircase; she climbed the endless flights that turned round and round the caged-in shaft of the well, past the latticed doors of the lift, and came up on to a landing that she knew, and into the long, ash-grey, foreign corridor lit by a dull window at one end.

It was there that the horror of the place came on her. She had no longer any memory of St. Mary's Church, so that she was unaware of her backward course through time. All space and time were here.

She remembered she had to go to the left, the left.

But there was something there; where the corridor turned by the window; at the end of all the corridors. If she went the other way she would escape it.

This corridor stopped there. A blank wall. She was driven back past the stairhead to the left.

At the corner, by the window, she turned down another long ash-grey corridor on her right, and to the right again where the night-light sputtered on the table-flap at the turn.

This third corridor was dark and secret and depraved. She knew the soiled walls, and the warped door at the end. There was a sharp-pointed streak of light at the top. She could see the number on it now, 107.

Something had happened there. If she went in it would happen again.

Oscar Wade was in the room waiting for her behind the closed door. She felt him moving about in there. She leaned forward, her ear to the key-hole, and listened. She could hear the measured, deliberate, thoughtful footsteps. They were coming from the bed to the door.

She turned and ran; her knees gave way under her; she sank and ran on, down the long grey corridors and the stairs, quick and blind, a hunted beast seeking for cover, hearing his feet coming after her.

The revolving doors caught her and pushed her out into the street.

The strange quality of her state was this, that it had no time. She remembered dimly that there had once been a thing called time; but she had forgotten altogether what it was like. She was aware of things happening and about to happen; she fixed them by the place they occupied, and measured their duration by the space she went through.

So now she thought: If I could only go back and get to the place where it hadn't happened.

To get back farther—

She was walking now on a white road that went between broad grass borders. To the right and left were the long raking lines of the hills, curve after curve, shimmering in a thin mist.

The road dropped to the green valley. It mounted the humped bridge over the river. Beyond it she saw the twin gables of the grey house pricked up over the high, grey garden wall. The tall iron gate stood in front of it between the ball-topped stone pillars.

And now she was in a large, low-ceilinged room with drawn blinds. She was standing before the wide double bed. It was her father's bed. The dead body, stretched out in the middle under the drawn white sheet, was her father's body.

The outline of the sheet sank from the peak of the upturned toes to the shin bone, and from the high bridge of the nose to the chin.

She lifted the sheet and folded it back across the breast of the dead man. The face she saw then was Oscar Wade's face, stilled and smoothed in the innocence of sleep, the supreme innocence of death. She stared at it, fascinated, in a cold, pitiless joy.

Oscar was dead.

She remembered how he used to lie like that beside her in the room in the Hotel Saint Pierre, on his back with his hands folded on his waist, his mouth half open, his big chest rising and falling. If he was dead, it would never happen again. She would be safe.

The dead face frightened her, and she was about to cover it up again when she was aware of a light heaving, a rhythmical rise and fall. As she drew the sheet up tighter, the hands under it began to struggle convulsively, the broad ends of the fingers appeared above the edge, clutching it to keep it down. The mouth opened; the eyes opened; the whole face stared back at her in a look of agony and horror.

Then the body drew itself forwards from the hips and sat up, its eyes peering into her eyes; he and she remained for an instant motionless, each held there by the other's fear.

Suddenly she broke away, turned and ran, out of the room, out of the house.

She stood at the gate, looking up and down the road, not knowing by which way she must go to escape Oscar. To the right, over the bridge and up the hill and across the downs she would come to the arcades of the rue de Rivoli and the dreadful grey corridors of the hotel. To the left the road went through the village.

If she could get farther back she would be safe, out of Oscar's reach. Standing by her father's death-bed she had been young, but not young enough. She must get back to the place where she was younger still, to the Park and the green drive under the beech trees and the white pavilion at the cross. She knew how to find it. At the end of the village the high road ran right and left, east and west, under the Park walls; the south gate stood there at the top looking down the narrow street.

She ran towards it through the village, past the long grey barns of Goodyer's farm, past the grocer's shop, past the yellow front and blue sign of the 'Queen's Head', past the post office, with its one black window blinking under its vine, past the church and the yew-trees in the churchyard, to where the south gate made a delicate black pattern on the green grass.

These things appeared insubstantial, drawn back behind a sheet of air that shimmered over them like thin glass. They

opened out, floated past and away from her; and instead of the high road and park walls she saw a London street of dingy white façades, and instead of the south gate the swinging glass doors of Schnebler's Restaurant.

The glass doors swung open and she passed into the restaurant. The scene beat on her with the hard impact of reality: the white and gold panels, the white pillars and their curling gold capitals, the white circles of the tables, glittering, the flushed faces of the diners, moving mechanically.

She was driven forward by some irresistible compulsion to a table in the corner, where a man sat alone. The table napkin he was using hid his mouth, and jaw, and chest; and she was not sure of the upper part of the face above the straight, drawn edge. It dropped; and she saw Oscar Wade's face. She came to him, dragged, without power to resist; she sat down beside him, and he leaned to her over the table; she could feel the warmth of his red, congested face; the smell of wine floated towards her on his thick whisper.

'I knew you would come.'

She ate and drank with him in silence, nibbling and sipping slowly, staving off the abominable moment it would end in.

At last they got up and faced each other. His long bulk stood before her, above her; she could almost feel the vibration of its power.

'Come,' he said. 'Come.'

And she went before him, slowly, slipping out through the maze of the tables, hearing behind her Oscar's measured, deliberate, thoughtful tread. The steep, red-carpeted staircase rose up before her.

She swerved from it, but he turned her back.

'You know the way,' he said.

At the top of the flight she found the white door of the room she knew. She knew the long windows guarded by drawn muslin blinds; the gilt looking-glass over the chimney-piece that reflected Oscar's head and shoulders grotesquely between two white porcelain babies with bulbous limbs and garlanded loins, she knew the sprawling stain on the drab carpet by the table, the shabby, infamous couch behind the screen.

They moved about the room, turning and turning in it like

beasts in a cage, uneasy, inimical, avoiding each other.

At last they stood still, he at the window, she at the door, the length of the room between.

'It's no good your getting away like that,' he said. 'There couldn't be any other end to it – to what we did.'

'But that *was* ended.'

'Ended there, but not here.'

'Ended for ever. We've done with it for ever.'

'We haven't. We've got to begin again. And go on and go on.'

'Oh, no. No. Anything but that.'

'There isn't anything else.'

'We can't. We can't. Don't you remember how it bored us?'

'Remember? Do you suppose I'd touch you if I could help it.'

... 'That's what we're here for. We must. We must.'

'No. No. I shall get away – now.'

She turned to the door to open it.

'You can't,' he said. 'The door's locked.'

'Oscar – what did you do that for?'

'We always did it. Don't you remember?'

She turned to the door again and shook it; she beat on it with her hands.

'It's no use, Harriott. If you got out now you'd only have to come back again. You might stave it off for an hour or so, but what's that in an immortality?'

'Immortality?'

'That's what we're in for.'

'Time enough to talk about immortality when we're dead. . . . Ah—'

They were being drawn towards each other across the room, moving slowly, like figures in some monstrous and appalling dance, their heads thrown back over their shoulders, their faces turned from the horrible approach. Their arms rose slowly, heavy with intolerable reluctance; they stretched them out towards each other, aching, as if they held up an overpowering weight. Their feet dragged and were drawn.

Suddenly her knees sank under her; she shut her eyes; all her being went down before him in darkness and terror.

It was over. She had got away, she was going back, back, to the

green drive of the Park, between the beech trees, where Oscar had never been, where he would never find her. When she passed through the south gate her memory became suddenly young and clean. She forgot the rue de Rivoli and the Hotel Saint Pierre; she forgot Schnebler's Restaurant and the room at the top of the stairs. She was back in her youth. She was Harriott Leigh going to wait for Stephen Philpotts in the pavilion opposite the west gate. She could feel herself, a slender figure moving fast over the grass between the lines of the great beech trees. The freshness of her youth was upon her.

She came to the heart of the drive where it branched right and left in the form of a cross. At the end of the right arm the white Greek temple, with its pediment and pillars, gleamed against the wood.

She was sitting on their seat at the back of the pavilion, watching the side door that Stephen would come in by.

The door was pushed open; he came towards her, light and young, skimming between the beech trees with his eager, tip-toeing stride. She rose up to meet him. She gave a cry.

'Stephen!'

It had been Stephen. She had seen him coming. But the man who stood before her between the pillars of the pavilion was Oscar Wade.

And now she was walking along the field-path that slanted from the orchard door to the stile; farther and farther back, to where young George Waring waited for her under the elder tree. The smell of the elder flowers came to her over the field. She could feel on her lips and in all her body the sweet, innocent excitement of her youth.

'George, oh, George?'

As she went along the field-path she had seen him. But the man who stood waiting for her under the elder tree was Oscar Wade.

'I told you it's no use getting away, Harriott. Every path brings you back to me. You'll find me at every turn.'

'But how did you get *here*?'

'As I got into the pavilion. As I got into your father's room, on to his death bed. Because I *was* there. I am in all your memories.'

'My memories are innocent. How could you take my father's

place, and Stephen's and George Waring's? You?

'Because I did take them.'

'Never. My love for *them* was innocent.'

'Your love for me was part of it. You think the past affects the future. Has it never struck you that the future may affect the past? In your innocence there was the beginning of your sin. You *were* what you *were to be*.'

'I shall get away,' she said.

'And, this time, I shall go with you.'

The stile, the elder tree, and the field floated away from her. She was going under the beech trees down the Park drive towards the south gate and the village, slinking close to the right-hand row of trees. She was aware that Oscar Wade was going with her under the left-hand row, keeping even with her, step by step, and tree by tree. And presently there was grey pavement under her feet and a row of grey pillars on her right hand. They were walking side by side down the rue de Rivoli towards the hotel.

They were sitting together now on the edge of the dingy white bed. Their arms hung by their sides, heavy and limp, their heads drooped, averted. Their passion weighed on them with the unbearable, unescapable boredom of immortality.

'Oscar - how long will it last?'

'I can't tell you. I don't know whether *this* is one moment of eternity, or the eternity of one moment.'

'It must end some time,' she said. 'Life doesn't go on for ever. We shall die.'

'Die? We *have* died. Don't you know what this is? Don't you know where you are? This is death. We're dead, Harriott. We're in hell.'

'Yes. There can't be anything worse than this.'

'This isn't the worst. We're not quite dead yet, as long as we've life in us to turn and run and get away from each other; as long as we can escape into our memories. But when you've got back to the farthest memory of all and there's nothing beyond it— When there's no memory but this—

'In the last hell we shall not run away any longer; we shall find no more roads, no more passages, no more open doors. We shall have no need to look for each other.

'In the last death we shall be shut up in this room, behind that

locked door, together. We shall lie here together, for ever and ever, joined so fast that even God can't put us asunder. We shall be one flesh and one spirit, one sin repeated for ever, and ever; spirit loathing flesh, flesh loathing spirit; you and I loathing each other.'

'Why? Why?' she cried.

'Because that's all that's left us. That's what you made of love.'

The darkness came down swamping, it blotted out the room. She was walking along a garden path between high borders of phlox and larkspur and lupin. They were taller than she was, their flowers swayed and nodded above her head. She tugged at the tall stems and had no strength to break them. She was a little thing.

She said to herself then that she was safe. She had gone back so far that she was a child again; she had the blank innocence of childhood. To be a child, to go small under the heads of the lupins, to be blank and innocent, without memory, was to be safe.

The walk led her out through a yew hedge on to a bright green lawn. In the middle of the lawn there was a shallow round pond in a ring of rockery cushioned with small flowers, yellow and white and purple. Goldfish swam in the olive brown water. She would be safe when she saw the goldfish swimming towards her. The old one with the white scales would come up first, pushing up his nose, making bubbles in the water.

At the bottom of the lawn there was a privet hedge cut by a broad path that went through the orchard. She knew what she would find there; her mother was in the orchard. She would lift her up in her arms to play with the hard red balls of the apples that hung from the tree. She had got back to the farthest memory of all; there was nothing beyond it.

There would be an iron gate in the wall of the orchard. It would lead into a field.

Something was different here, something that frightened her. An ash-grey door instead of an iron gate.

She pushed it open and came into the last corridor of the Hotel Saint Pierre.

*Since the mid-point of this century technological and social changes of great moment have been taking place, bringing new avenues of experience to us all – whether we like them or not. The most significant of all developments, surely, has been the beginning of man's real excursion into the realm of Outer Space. No longer confined to one tiny planet, already becoming rapidly exploited both physically and conceptually, we now look outward into a limitless expanse of space and time. What new horrors shall we find there? Only the wildest optimist would hold that as we travel across the voids between planets and, perhaps some day, between stars, we shall not be faced with some highly unpleasant surprises. The material of science fiction, quite naturally, has attempted to consider some of these, and in *Mind At Bay I* included a longish story by the computer scientist, Perry Chapdelaine, which dealt with one possible hazard concerning contact with a superior alien life form. Chapdelaine's contribution proved to be one of the most popular in the last collection, and I am therefore including a new, and previously unpublished, story of his in this book. It is an elusive piece which can be read and interpreted in a number of different ways. But however each of us understands it, it remains a warning and a threat of the complications that space exploration will surely bring.*

Breathe! Breathe! Oh God, how I would Breathe!

by Perry A. Chapdelaine

My feet tread gently on wave-imprinted sand, where horizon's pencil-line joins red-water to the tan.

Nostalgic salt spray dashes through briny-weed leaving my security intact.

Turning I see huddled boxy houses, each flush to the ground, none more than two stories high, lined stucco-white, square of door and window, joined to one another in long rows of sentry caverns, broken only by yawning cross-streets.

I walk toward the nearest open street, arms swinging freely,

close, warm in my feelings. Beyond the first home, turn left – teenagers – waiting for simple artlessness like me, to pass.

Will they tease?

Will I fight?

Must I fight?

Dare I turn now? Surely they will run after me, thinking me a coward.

Breathing deeply, I exhale the last of the blood-red salt-tang. On my face, a pretended smile of friendliness – an ‘I’m one of you, gang!’ look.

I walk toward the tallest who is surrounded by four, t-shirt, blue-jean, bedecked.

Will they strike before talking?

Muscles sheathe-tight to maintain the outward calm, my thoughts buzz inside my hollow gourd, as if to say, ‘Here, try this one, or that one – try them all until you find your way out of *this* one!’

‘Hi!’ I greet with lying grin.

The tallest smiles!

He asks my name!

They all smile!

Unsung, my protective shield dissipates as though among friends, which I am. I *am* one of these.

Standing, we talk. I laugh, and levels rise with shared experiences, creatively pleased, alone, together.

But the nicest disappears!

Pushing his foot this way and that on hard-packed street dirt, he is with us, then gone. Like sharp lines of light extended from body’s every point, my imaged after-view lingers grotesquely.

Does anyone notice?

Oh, if I could but breathe – Breathe! Breathe! Oh God, how I would breathe!

Ah, relief! I am three people. Behind buffered bakery glass, I see tantalizing twists and shapes of delicious sweets. Hmmm – joyously satiating, pleausurably fulfilling, how honeyed they taste! *That* one kind of plumish with a tartness touch. *This* one over here an exploding orange.

One of me has turned and I see the other two. One of me has long curls of brown, blue eyes and long pull-over purpled dress. My smile *there* is genuine and teeth so pretty.

The other me has button-down lapels and . . . Button-down lapels?

Why would anyone want button-down lapels?

Oh abnormality! Someone ought to tell *this* me button-down lapels are unseemly. Old, outdated, not the style.

Do they fear to hurt this me's feelings? With the thought, a shock; the other used-to-be-mes walk away. I stand with the oddity of button-down lapels.

Inside my mind, a delicate, feather sensation, not the bottom buttons of button-down lapels. Nibbling with delicate bits, I struggle, surround it, peer through it, my eyes focus far ahead where can be seen Mr. Button-down lapels walking arm-in-arm with my girl-friend.

I don't mind because Mr. Button-down lapels disappears in vectors of soft, white light. Ha! Ha! Oh, I did see it!

Night time is best for flying. Swinging, pressing, pushing hard. I flap my arms to soar; below, silhouetted against city's rhythmical lights: telephone wires, high-powered electrical lines, tall gnarled trees, radio beacons, TV masts, statues of humanity's pride.

Is a law which says, 'The harder one flaps, the harder one falls,' like self-consuming snakes?

In panic, I struggle while inevitable pollution-loaded wires beckon - ah! But there's a friendly tree. I dive into arm's-spread life, curling fingers around thick branches to hold tight. Here, in nature's natural womb, I rest, and reluctantly view future's sight. I look around, too, and smell the night.

It is dark under dangling tree leaves. Freshness smells, leaves rustle, as wind blows through.

Below are cars and trucks and other scuttling gas-spewers, but here, in the air, high above the road, I am safe, and I nestle, in rest, in peace.

Strengthened, again I soar up, and yet up, I go, feeling the grand ballroom of the skies, where all directions loft, where blocky white and patchy blue spirit away with you.

Coiling, snarling, freedom's ceiling reached - arms tire - downward, faster, faster, sawing arms, I bump the ground with despair; I awaken the other graceful flights, which end humilatingly, the night.

A great cry surges forward, my grief, as those thousands of experiences burst – a rock among light-bulbs, a saint among bastards!

Draggingly, carelessly, in my apathy, never caring, small thoughts slide upward, uninvited. I sleep gently, and pray – Oh God, how I would breathe!

In my sleep I dream I sleep and in *that* sleep I view the beloved, dead – long-ago – grandmother, in her coffin. Pico-seconds are too small to flesh her out as bulging bouquets push against plush silk-lining. There comes a flower with broad petals of most beautiful red, deep, blood-colored. It grows quickly and folds into rose buds of giant size and terrible beauty, and teasing aroma.

Otherwise I rest in the sleep, and the sleep within the sleep, and all is well.

Soothing warmth inside wintry blasts greet my morning. For school I prepare my second best suit-coat – the one with narrow lapels and small, nearly invisible pin-stripes.

All around are girls and boys. See Mary study! See Peter study! While others sneak comic books behind large geography books. *She* can't see the comics; I wish I had thought to bring mine. I feel so naked without it, and the clock moves so slow.

Teacher's eyes pierce me, stabbing with tiny, lined, jagged hooks. I scribble numbers on paper, closing my eyes ever so often, and scrunch my brow to pretend hard thinking.

She turns away. I – a boy again, human, normal.

The boy next to me opens his desk and lifts out a guitar which grows and grows until I think it will pop. *Then* what will old hook eye do?

He plays; others sing. Everyone joins to sing, to clap, to dance, and he rides it – a rectangular box-shaped guitar sweeps him side-wise and tows its keys back and forth. Its shoulder string strains as it prances and bucks, a mockery of the blood and flesh horse. Music pours forth from elsewhere.

One disappears, forming pencil flares of light, but we continue clapping and stomping until night; and granite-hard joy remains impervious.

Home again I lay on my hard slab to dream, unfolding images upward, focussing them sharply with crystalline tones. My hands sweep forward in expert piano movements. Classical arrangements, dixieland, pop – sharp, brilliant melodies captivate the silent depths of my soul!

Gushing upward, outward, the music boils, flows; I am the chords scratching away brittleness which comes of being human.

My ego accepts, sweeps along, swelling and expanding with pleasure over notes and their inter-binding structure; I marvel at my ease and proficiency, for in real life, though I practice hard, *I cannot play a note!*

Self-awareness of my own musical genius, as with self-appreciation, depreciates the talent. Like water from wet cheese it drips my capacity away, and I awaken with keen sorrow; I cry again.

My slab is solid underneath and around me is the silence of the night and I wonder, which is reality? The dreams? Or, the night?

Goose-down mattress fluffs with sibilance of breathing air as I toss and turn, torn by my ambiguities, scarred by my inconsistencies. Wonderment, concern – has all been real? Should people disappear? Will I disappear, too?

Startled adrenalin jumps my heart. Quicker my thinking plunges to encircle like a spinning wheel; I sway back and forth in ever-tighter circles; then, grasping one central, prominent idea – the disappearing humans – I steady to form a stable angular velocity.

Insane?

Psychedelic?

A figment, bound by alien mental imagination?

I pinch me. Ouch! Oh how it hurts!

I am enclosed in signal-killing wrappers where sight, sound, touch, smell and taste are not.

Monsters from outer space have descended; they are capturing and destroying selected humans.

Is reality?

Where is Occam's razor, and does it apply?

Alien with sensations, moods, nervous structure, tongue and taste – do I belong? And what of the disappearances?

When I reach the camping trailer tucked between rows of soft-murmuring pines, I throw myself on plywood-hardened mattress to worry away the formal rhythm of life.

Dreams come. They flicker and flash, colours and half-lights, sensations – never pausing long enough to say, 'This is what I am!'

I awake. The fire starts with last night's bacon-drippings and it sputters and fills the morning air with hickory smoke, a pungent smell, a pleasant, man-filling smell. I fry eggs and think.

Where is Occam's razor? Which is the simpler hypothesis?

All around me campers stare. Until I look down, I think it is the pleasing hickory smoke; but, except for my high-school ring, *I am naked!*

I cross my hands in front of my genitals to hide when everyone laughs – some in loud, coarse guffaws, others in gentle, tinkly titters.

Though I run in zig-zags, there are not clothes to wear. Is there a hole smaller than nothing?

I grow, though, when some disappear in blinding white light.

My ego sinks down and inward until, like a pigmy inside the giant's space-suit, my ego sits there to objectively grasp, synchronize and decide on incoming body-signals.

Illogically, inside the protective suit of my body, I feel huge, giant-like, capable now of non-emotional thoughts.

My body burns with its embarrassment and I, with complete objectivity, change its color. Anger, grief, apathy, fear, happiness and boredom are as easily controlled, their importance tags as easily clipped. I think rationally, non-trivially, and I am in control.

Breathe! Breathe! Oh God, how I would breathe!

Hidden foundations of reality suggest, intuitively, that I 'Come, pick up Occam's razor!' Other truths pass in bright sounds and colors and shapes and smells and sensations, and I let them pass.

Now it is mine!

Beneath the melange, a block: John has a book! Mary has a book! All the children have a book!

Beneath the block, a knowingness: a truth irrefutably known, trivial, unimportant, for evermore: 'All who disappear return home - from sleep to life; from matter to spirit!

'Our father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
...,' I say.

Then I, too, disappear, leaving behind my human body, space-suit encapsulated.

For the thousandth time, my tiny experimental ship, now filled with excess metabolites and sans oxygen swings over the Rook Mountains, over the craters of Gasendi, Euclides, Landsberg, Reinhold, Copernicus, Archimedes, Aristiullus, Theaetetus, Eudoxus and Democritus, toward the moon's dark side!

And, after the Lord's prayer, my last thought, still a prayer, still a plea, ringed with the shivering spears of jellied light, says, 'Breathe! Breathe! Oh God, how I would breathe!'

With the searing death of the astronauts Grissom, White and Chaffee on the launchpad at Cape Kennedy, and that of the Russian Komarov in the crash-landing of the first Soyuz rocket, spaceflight shed its schoolboy image of untouched gloss and glamour and acquired the hard stamp of reality. Significantly, the English science fiction writer J. G. Ballard, who has categorized these catastrophes as 'ritual deaths', has turned his attention to the less obvious aspects of spaceflight, suggesting that the astronauts are probing not only outer space, but also the uncharted territory of the unconscious. In his magnificent 'The Dead Astronaut', Ballard looks to a future where Cape Kennedy itself is out-of-date, the launch complexes barren wastelands haunted by souvenir hunters seeking trophies and relics of the pioneer days of rocketry. To the Cape come a former space scientist and his mistress – widow of an astronaut whose body has circled the earth for decades, but which is about due to make re-entry into the earth's atmosphere. This story, which swings back and to between fantasy and reality, represents the real horror fiction of the 1980's, more gripping, disturbing and plausible than Orwell's off-course vision of that decade. The terrors of the future will come not from the drab repressions of an encroaching bureaucracy, but from the neon lights of a thousand supermarkets, the sounds of a million automobile accidents and from the public cremation of the dead astronauts as they return to earth.

The Dead Astronaut

by J. G. Ballard

Cape Kennedy has gone now, its gantries rising from the deserted dunes. Sand has come in across the Banana River, filling the creeks and turning the old space complex into a wilderness of swamps and broken concrete. In the summer, hunters build their blinds in the wrecked staff cars; but by early November, when Judith and I arrived, the entire area was abandoned. Beyond Cocoa Beach, where I stopped the car, the ruined motels were

half hidden in the saw grass. The launching towers rose into the evening air like the rusting ciphers of some forgotten algebra of the sky.

'The perimeter fence is half a mile ahead,' I said. 'We'll wait here until it's dark. Do you feel better now?'

Judith was staring at an immense funnel of cerise cloud that seemed to draw the day with it below the horizon, taking the light from her faded blonde hair. The previous afternoon, in the hotel in Tampa, she had fallen ill briefly with some unspecified complaint.

'What about the money?' she asked. 'They may want more, now that we're here.'

'Five thousand dollars? Ample, Judith. These relic hunters are a dying breed – few people are interested in Cape Kennedy any longer. What's the matter?'

Her thin fingers were fretting at the collar of her suede jacket. 'I . . . it's just that perhaps I should have worn black.'

'Why? Judith, this isn't a funeral. For heaven's sake, Robert died twenty years ago. I know all he meant to us, but . . .'

Judith was staring at the debris of tires and abandoned cars, her pale eyes becalmed in her drawn face. 'Philip, don't you understand, he's coming back now. Someone's got to be here. The memorial service over the radio was a horrible travesty – my God, that priest would have had a shock if Robert had talked back to him. There ought to be a full-scale committee, not just you and I and these empty night clubs.'

In a firmer voice, I said: 'Judith, there would be a committee – if we told the NASA Foundation what we know. The remains would be interred in the NASA vault at Arlington, there'd be a band – even the President might be there. There's still time.'

I waited for her to reply, but she was watching the gantries fade into the night sky. Fifteen years ago, when the dead astronaut orbiting the earth in his burned-out capsule had been forgotten, Judith had constituted herself a memorial committee of one. Perhaps, in a few days, when she finally held the last relics of Robert Hamilton's body in her own hands, she would come to terms with her obsession.

'Philip, over there! Is that –'

High in the western sky, between the constellations Cepheus and Cassiopeia, a point of white light moved toward us, like a

lost star searching for its zodiac. Within a few minutes, it passed overhead, its faint beacon setting behind the cirrus over the sea.

'It's all right, Judith.' I showed her the trajectory timetables penciled into my diary. 'The relic hunters read these orbits off the sky better than any computer. They must have been watching the pathways for years.'

'Who was it?'

'A Russian woman pilot – Valentina Prokrovna. She was sent up from a site near the Urals twenty-five years ago to work on a television relay system.'

'Television? I hope they enjoyed the program.'

This callous remark, uttered by Judith as she stepped from the car, made me realize once again her special motives for coming to Cape Kennedy. I watched the capsule of the dead woman disappear over the dark Atlantic stream, as always moved by the tragic but serene spectacle of one of these ghostly voyagers coming back after so many years from the tideways of space. All I knew of this dead Russian was her code name: Seagull. Yet, for some reason, I was glad to be there as she came down. Judith, on the other hand, felt nothing of this. During all the years she had sat in the garden in the cold evenings, too tired to bring herself to bed, she had been sustained by her concern for one only of the 12 dead astronauts orbiting the night sky.

As she waited, her back to the sea, I drove the car into the garage of an abandoned night club fifty yards from the road. From the trunk I took out two suitcases. One, a light travel case, contained clothes for Judith and myself. The other, fitted with a foil inlay, reinforcing straps and a second handle, was empty.

We set off north toward the perimeter fence, like two late visitors arriving at a resort abandoned years earlier.

It was twenty years now since the last rockets had left their launching platforms at Cape Kennedy. At the time, NASA had already moved Judith and me – I was a senior flight programmer – to the great new Planetary Space Complex in New Mexico. Shortly after our arrival, we had met one of the trainee astronauts, Robert Hamilton. After two decades, all I could remember of this overpolite but sharp-eyed young man was his albino skin, so like Judith's pale eyes and opal hair, the same cold gene that

crossed them both with its arctic pallor. We had been close friends for barely six weeks. Judith's infatuation was one of those confused sexual impulses that well-brought-up young women express in their own naïve way; and as I watched them swim and play tennis together, I felt not so much resentful as concerned to sustain the whole passing illusion for her.

A year later, Robert Hamilton was dead. He had returned to Cape Kennedy for the last military flights before the launching grounds were closed. Three hours after lift-off, a freak meteorite collision ruptured his oxygen support system. He had lived on in his suit for another five hours. Although calm at first, his last radio transmissions were an incoherent babble Judith and I had never been allowed to hear.

A dozen astronauts had died in orbital accidents, their capsules left to revolve through the night sky like the stars of a new constellation; and at first, Judith had shown little response. Later, after her miscarriage, the figure of this dead astronaut circling the sky above us re-emerged in her mind as an obsession with time. For hours, she would stare at the bedroom clock, as if waiting for something to happen.

Five years later, after I resigned from NASA, we made our first trip to Cape Kennedy. A few military units still guarded the derelict gantries, but already the former launching site was being used as a satellite graveyard. As the dead capsules lost orbital velocity, they homed onto the master radio beacon. As well as the American vehicles, Russian and French satellites in the joint Euro-American space projects were brought down here, the burned-out hulks of the capsules exploding across the cracked concrete.

Already, too, the relic hunters were at Cape Kennedy, scouring the burning saw grass for instrument panels and flying suits and – most valuable of all – the mummified corpses of the dead astronauts.

These blackened fragments of collar-bone and shin, kneecap and rib, were the unique relics of the space age, as treasured as the saintly bones of medieval shrines. After the first fatal accidents in space, public outcry demanded that these orbiting biers be brought down to earth. Unfortunately, when a returning moon rocket crashed into the Kalahari Desert, aboriginal tribesmen broke into the vehicle. Believing the crew to be dead gods,

they cut off the eight hands and vanished into the bush. It had taken two years to track them down. From then on, the capsules were left in orbit to burn out on re-entry.

Whatever remains survived the crash landings in the satellite graveyard were scavenged by the relic hunters of Cape Kennedy. This band of nomads had lived for years in the wrecked cars and motels, stealing their icons under the feet of the wardens who patrolled the concrete decks. In early October, when a former NASA colleague told me that Robert Hamilton's satellite was becoming unstable, I drove down to Tampa and began to inquire about the purchase price of Robert's mortal remains. Five thousand dollars was a small price to pay for laying his ghost to rest in Judith's mind.

Eight hundred yards from the road, we crossed the perimeter fence. Crushed by the dunes, long sections of the twenty-foot-high palisade had collapsed, the saw grass growing through the steel mesh. Below us, the boundary road passed a derelict guard-house and divided into two paved tracks. As we waited at this rendezvous, the headlamps of the wardens' half-tracks flared across the gantries near the beach.

Five minutes later, a small dark-faced man climbed from the rear seat of a car buried in the sand fifty yards away. Head down, he scuttled over to us.

'Mr. and Mrs. Groves?' After a pause to peer into our faces, he introduced himself tersely: 'Quinton. Sam Quinton.'

As he shook hands, his clawlike fingers examined the bones of my wrist and forearm. His sharp nose made circles in the air. He had the eyes of a nervous bird, forever searching the dunes and the grass. An Army webbing belt hung around his patched black denims. He moved his hands restlessly in the air, as if conducting a chamber ensemble hidden behind the sand hills, and I noticed his badly scarred palms. Huge weals formed pale stars in the darkness.

For a moment, he seemed disappointed by us, almost reluctant to move on. Then he set off at a brisk pace across the dunes, now and then leaving us to blunder about helplessly. Half an hour later, when we entered a shallow basin near a farm of alkali-settling beds, Judith and I were exhausted, dragging the suitcases over the broken tires and barbed wire.

A group of cabins had been dismantled from their original

sites along the beach and re-erected in the basin. Isolated rooms tilted on the sloping sand, mantelpieces and flowered paper decorating the outer walls.

The basin was full of salvaged space material: sections of capsules, heat shields, antennas and parachute canisters. Near the dented hull of a weather satellite, two sallow-faced men in sheep-skin jackets sat on a car seat. The older wore a frayed Air Force cap over his eyes. With his scarred hands, he was polishing the steel visor of a space helmet. The other, a young man with a faint beard hiding his mouth, watched us approach with the detached and neutral gaze of an undertaker.

We entered the largest of the cabins, two rooms taken off the rear of a beachhouse. Quinton lit a paraffin lamp. He pointed around the dingy interior. 'You'll be . . . comfortable,' he said without conviction. As Judith stared at him with unconcealed distaste, he added pointedly: 'We don't get many visitors.'

I put the suitcases on the metal bed. Judith walked into the kitchen and Quinton began to open the empty case.

'It's in here?'

I took the two packets of \$100 bills from my jacket. When I had handed them to him, I said: 'The suitcase is for the . . . remains. Is it big enough?'

Quinton peered at me through the ruby light, as if baffled by our presence there. 'You could have spared yourself the trouble. They've been up there a long time, Mr. Groves. After the impact' – for some reason, he cast a lewd eye in Judith's direction – 'there might be enough for a chess set.'

When he had gone, I went into the kitchen. Judith stood by the stove, hands on a carton of canned food. She was staring through the window at the metal salvage, refuse of the sky that still carried Robert Hamilton in its rusty centrifuge. For a moment, I had the feeling that the entire landscape of the earth was covered with rubbish and that here, at Cape Kennedy, we had found its source.

I held her shoulders. 'Judith, is there any point in this? Why don't we go back to Tampa? I could drive here in ten days' time when it's all over—'

She turned from me, her hands rubbing the suede where I had marked it. 'Philip, I want to be here – no matter how unpleasant. Can't you understand?'

At midnight, when I finished making a small meal for us, she was standing on the concrete wall of the settling tank. The three relic hunters sitting on their car seats watched her without moving, scarred hands like flames in the darkness.

At three o'clock that morning, as we lay awake on the narrow bed. Valentina Prokrovna came down from the sky. Enthroned on a bier of burning aluminium 300 yards wide, she soared past on her final orbit. When I went out into the night air, the relic hunters had gone. From the rim of the settling tank, I watched them race away among the dunes, leaping like hares over the tires and wire.

I went back to the cabin. 'Judith, she's coming down. Do you want to watch?'

Her blonde hair tied within a white towel, Judith lay on the bed, staring at the cracked plasterboard ceiling. Shortly after four o'clock, as I sat beside her, a phosphorescent light filled the hollow. There was the distant sound of explosions, muffled by the high wall of the dunes. Lights flared, followed by the noise of engines and sirens.

At dawn the relic hunters returned, scarred hands wrapped in makeshift bandages, dragging their booty with them.

After this melancholy rehearsal, Judith entered a period of sudden and unexpected activity. As if preparing the cabin for some visitor, she rehung the curtains and swept out the two rooms with meticulous care, even bringing herself to ask Quinton for a bottle of cleanser. For hours she sat at the dressing table, brushing and shaping her hair, trying out first one style and then another. I watched her feel the hollows of her cheeks, searching for the contours of a face that had vanished twenty years ago. As she spoke about Robert Hamilton, she almost seemed worried that she would appear old to him. At other times, she referred to Robert as if he were a child, the son she and I had never been able to conceive since her miscarriage. These different roles followed one another like scenes in some private psychodrama. However, without knowing it, for years Judith and I had used Robert Hamilton for our own reasons. Waiting for him to land, and well aware that after this Judith would have no one to turn to except myself, I said nothing.

Meanwhile, the relic hunters worked on the fragments of Valentina Prokrovna's capsule: the blistered heat shield, the chassis of the radiotelemetry unit and several cans of film that recorded her collision and act of death (these, if still intact, would fetch the highest prices, films of horrific and dreamlike violence played in the underground cinemas of Los Angeles, London and Moscow). Passing the next cabin, I saw a tattered silver space suit spread-eagled on two automobile seats. Quinton and the relic hunters knelt beside it, their arms deep inside the legs and sleeves, gazing at me with the rapt and sensitive eyes of jewelers.

An hour before dawn, I was awakened by the sound of engines along the beach. In the darkness, the three relic hunters crouched by the settling tank, their pinched faces lit by the head lamps. A long convoy of trucks and half-tracks was moving into the launching ground. Soldiers jumped down from the tailboards, unloading tents and supplies.

'What are they doing?' I asked Quinton. 'Are they looking for us?'

The old man cupped a scarred hand over his eyes. 'It's the Army,' he said uncertainly. 'Maneuvers, maybe. They haven't been here before like this.'

'What about Hamilton?' I gripped his bony arm. 'Are you sure—?'

He pushed me away with a show of nervous temper. 'We'll get him first. Don't worry, he'll be coming sooner than they think.'

Two nights later, as Quinton prophesied, Robert Hamilton began his final descent. From the dunes near the settling tanks, we watched him emerge from the stars on his last run. Reflected in the windows of the buried cars, a thousand images of the capsule flared in the saw grass around us. Behind the satellite, a wide fan of silver spray opened in a phantom wake.

In the Army encampment by the gantries, there was a surge of activity. A blaze of head lamps crossed the concrete lanes. Since the arrival of these military units, it had become plain to me, if not to Quinton, that far from being on maneuvers, they were preparing for the landing of Robert Hamilton's capsule. A dozen

half-tracks had been churning around the dunes, setting fire to the abandoned cabins and crushing the old car bodies. Platoons of soldiers were repairing the perimeter fence and replacing the sections of metaled road that the relic hunters had dismantled.

Shortly after midnight, at an elevation of forty-two degrees in the northwest, between Lyra and Hercules, Robert Hamilton appeared for the last time. As Judith stood up and shouted into the night air, an immense blade of light cleft the sky. The expanding corona sped toward us like a gigantic signal flare, illuminating every fragment of the landscape.

'Mrs. Groves!' Quinton darted after Judith and pulled her down into the grass as she ran toward the approaching satellite. Three hundred yards away, the silhouette of a half-track stood out on an isolated dune, its feeble spotlights drowned by the glare.

With a low metallic sigh, the burning capsule of the dead astronaut soared over our heads, the vaporizing metal pouring from its hull. A few seconds later, as I shielded my eyes, an explosion of detonating sand rose from the ground behind me. A curtain of dust lifted into the darkening air like a vast specter of powdered bone. The sounds of the impact rolled across the dunes. Near the launching gantries, fires flickered where fragments of the capsule had landed. A pall of phosphorescing gas hung in the air, particles within it beading and winking.

Judith had gone, running after the relic hunters through the swerving spotlights. When I caught up with them, the last fires of the explosion were dying among the gantries. The capsule had landed near the old Atlas launching pads, forming a shallow crater fifty yards in diameter. The slopes were scattered with glowing particles, sparkling like fading eyes. Judith ran distraughtly up and down, searching the fragments of smoldering metal.

Someone struck my shoulder. Quinton and his men, hot ash on their scarred hands, ran past like a troop of madmen, eyes wild in the crazed night. As we darted away through the flaring spotlights, I looked back at the beach. The gantries were enveloped in a pale-silver sheen that hovered there and then moved away like a dying wraith over the sea.

At dawn, as the engines growled among the dunes, we col-

lected the last remains of Robert Hamilton. The old man came into our cabin. As Judith watched from the kitchen, drying her hands on a towel, he gave me a cardboard shoe box.

I held the box in my hands. 'Is this all you could get?'

'It's all there was. Look at them, if you want.'

'That's all right. We'll be leaving in half an hour.'

He shook his head. 'Not now. They're all around. If you move, they'll find us.'

He waited for me to open the shoe box, then grimaced and went out into the pale light.

We stayed for another four days, as the Army patrols searched the surrounding dunes. Day and night, the half-tracks lumbered among the wrecked cars and cabins. Once, as I watched with Quinton from a fallen water tower, a half-track and two jeeps came within 400 yards of the basin, held back only by the stench from the settling beds and the cracked concrete causeways.

During this time, Judith sat in the cabin, the shoe box on her lap. She said nothing to me, as if she had lost all interest in me and the salvage-filled hollow at Cape Kennedy. Mechanically, she combed her hair, making and remaking her face.

On the second day, I came in after helping Quinton bury the cabins to their windows in the sand. Judith was standing by the table.

The shoe box was open. In the center of the table lay a pile of charred sticks, as if she had tried to light a small fire. Then I realized what was there. As she stirred the ash with her fingers, gray flakes fell from the joints, revealing the bony points of a clutch of ribs, a right hand and shoulder blade.

She looked at me with puzzled eyes. 'They're black,' she said.

Holding her in my arms, I lay with her on the bed. A loud-speaker reverberated among the dunes, fragments of the amplified commands drumming at the panes.

When they moved away, Judith said: 'We can go now.'

'In a little while, when it's clear. What about these?'

'Bury them. Anywhere, it doesn't matter.' She seemed calm at last, giving me a brief smile, as if to agree that this grim charade was at last over.

Yet, when I had packed the bones into the shoe box, scraping

up Robert Hamilton's ash with a dessertspoon, she kept it with her, carrying it into the kitchen while she prepared our meals.

It was on the third day that we fell ill.

After a long, noise-filled night, I found Judith sitting in front of the mirror, combing thick clumps of hair from her scalp. Her mouth was open, as if her lips were stained with acid. As she dusted the loose hair from her lap, I was struck by the leprous whiteness of her face.

Standing up with an effort, I walked listlessly into the kitchen and stared at the saucepan of cold coffee. A sense of indefinable exhaustion had come over me, as if the bones in my body had softened and lost their rigidity. On the lapels of my jacket, loose hair lay like spinning waste.

'Philip . . .' Judith swayed toward me. 'Do you feel— What is it?'

'The water.' I poured the coffee into the sink and massaged my throat. 'It must be fouled.'

'Can we leave?' She put a hand up to her forehead. Her brittle nails brought down a handful of frayed ash hair. 'Philip, for God's sake — I'm losing all my hair!'

Neither of us was able to eat. After forcing myself through a few slices of cold meat, I went out and vomited behind the cabin.

Quinton and his men were crouched by the wall of the settling tank. As I walked toward them, steadying myself against the hull of the weather satellite, Quinton came down. When I told him that the water supplies were contaminated, he stared at me with his hard bird's eyes.

Half an hour later, they were gone.

The next day, our last there, we were worse. Judith lay on the bed, shivering in her jacket, the shoe box held in one hand. I spent hours searching for fresh water in the cabins. Exhausted, I could barely cross the sandy basin. The Army patrols were closer. By now, I could hear the hard gear changes of the half-tracks. The sounds from the loudspeakers drummed like fists on my head.

Then, as I looked down at Judith from the cabin doorway, a few words stuck for a moment in my mind.

'... contaminated area ... evacuate ... radioactive ...'

I walked forward and pulled the box from Judith's hands.

'Philip ...' She looked up at me weakly. 'Give it back to me.'

Her face was a puffy mask. On her wrists, white flecks were forming. Her left hand reached toward me like the claw of a cadaver.

I shook the box with blunted anger. The bones rattled inside. 'For God's sake, it's *this*!' Don't you see - why we're ill?

'Philip - where are the others? The old man. Get them to help you.'

'They've gone. They went yesterday, I told you.' I let the box fall onto the table. The lid broke off, spilling the ribs tied together like a bundle of firewood. 'Quinton knew what was happening - why the Army is here. They're trying to warn us.'

'What do you mean?' Judith sat up, the focus of her eyes sustained only by a continuous effort. 'Don't let them take Robert. Bury him here somewhere. We'll come back later.'

'Judith!' I bent over the bed and shouted hoarsely at her. 'Don't you realize - there was a *bomb* on board! Robert Hamilton was carrying an atomic weapon!' I pulled back the curtains from the window. 'My God, what a joke. For twenty years, I put up with him because I couldn't ever be really sure ...'

'Philip ...'

'Don't worry, I used him - thinking about him was the only thing that kept us going. And all the time, he was waiting up there to pay us back!'

There was a rumble of exhaust outside. A half-track with red crosses on its doors and hood had reached the edge of the basin. Two men in vinyl suits jumped down, counters raised in front of them.

'Judith, before we go, tell me ... I never asked you—'

Judith was sitting up, touching the hair on her pillow. One half of her scalp was almost bald. She stared at her weak hands with their silvering skin. On her face was an expression I had never seen before, the dumb anger of betrayal.

As she looked at me, and at the bones scattered across the table, I knew my answer.

A famous British scientist once said that he would be quite happy living an eternal life if he could be given a limitless supply of the fruitfly drosophila and appropriate equipment to conduct mutation experiments. On reflection, one realizes that the infinite permutations of drosophila might keep one busy all right – but for eternity? Perhaps you would favour a desert island where the sun always shone and where fruit, flowers and sandy beaches abounded. Even this might cloy after a while. Take the island where ‘No Ships Pass’ for example . . .

No Ships Pass

by Lady Eleanor Smith

‘I am glad,’ thought Patterson, ‘that I’ve always been a damned good swimmer . . .’ and he continued to plough his way grimly through the churning, tumbled argent of the breakers. It seemed hours, although it was actually moments, since the yacht had disappeared in one brief flash of huge and bluish flame; now the seas tossed, untroubled, as though the yacht had never been; and the boat containing his comrades had vanished, too, he noticed, glancing over his shoulder – had vanished with such swiftness as to make him think that it must have been smudged by some gigantic sponge from the flat, greenish expanse of the ocean. The strange part was that he was able, as he swam, to think with a complete, detached coherence; he was conscious of no panic; on the contrary, as he strove with all his might to gain the strip of land dancing before his eyes, his mind worked with a calm and resolute competence.

‘I always thought we’d have a fire with all that petrol about . . . Curse all motor-yachts. . . . I wonder if the others have been drowned? . . . Good job I gave the boat a miss . . .’

He was not even conscious of much regret as he thought of the probable fate of his comrades – his employer, his employer’s son, the members of the crew. Already, as he swam on and on through gently lapping waves, the yacht and those who belonged to it had become part of the past, remote and half-forgotten. The

present and the future lay ahead, where a long line of sand shimmered like silver before his eyes. Yet it was funny, he mused; there had been no sign of land from aboard the yacht, and it was not until the actual panic of the fire that he had noticed the dim shape of this island, 'near enough to swim to,' as he had cried to the others, but they swarmed into the boat, taking no notice of his cries. And so he had embarked alone upon this perilous adventure.

He was a strong swimmer, but he was growing tired. Were his limbs suddenly heavier, or had the sea become less buoyant? He clenched his teeth, striking out desperately, then floated for a while, lying on his back, the huge arch of the sky towering a million miles above him like some gigantic bowl, all fierce hydrangea-blue. When he turned to swim again, he was refreshed, but more sensible of the terrors of his situation. And yet, was it his fancy, or had the shores of the island loomed nearer during the moments of this brief rest? At first he believed himself to be suffering from hallucination, then, as he looked again, he realized that he was making remarkable progress. . . . He was now so near that the beach glittered like snow in the tropical sunshine before his eyes, and the sands dazzled him, yet he could perceive, lapping against them, a line of softly creaming surf, and above the sands there blazed the vivid jewel-green of dense foliage. The gulls wheeled bright-winged against the brighter silver of sea and sand. Then he was prepared to swear that his ears distinguished, sounding from the shore, a harsh and murmurous cry that might have been – for he was very weary – something in the nature of a welcome for the creature trying so desperately to gain this sparkling and gaudy sanctuary.

And then exhaustion descended upon him like a numbing cloak, and his ears sang and his brain whirled. His limbs seemed weighted, and his heart pumped violently and he thought he must drown, and groaned, for at that moment life seemed sweet and vivid, since life was represented by the island, and the seas were death.

'Well, now for death,' he thought, and as he sank, his foot touched bottom.

He realized afterwards that he must have sobbed aloud as he staggered ashore. For a moment, as he stood, ankle-deep in warm, powdery sand, with the sun pouring fiercely upon his drenched

body, the surf curdling at his feet and the cool greenness of a thickly matted forest cresting the slope above his head, he still thought that he must be drowning, and that this land was mirage. Then the silence was shattered by a shrill scream; and a glowing parrot, rainbow-bright, flew suddenly from amidst the blood-red shower of a tall hibiscus-bush, to wheel, gorgeous and discordant, above his head. Beating wings of ruby and emerald and sapphire. Dripping fire-coloured blossom. Loud, jangling, piercing cries. The island was real.

Patterson fainted, flopping like a heap of old clothes upon the smooth, hard silver of the sand . . .

When he came to himself, the sun was lower and the air fragrant with a scented coolness that seemed the very perfume of dusk itself. For a moment he lay motionless, his mind blank, then, as complete consciousness returned to him and he rolled over on his face, he became aware of a black, human shadow splashed across the sands within a few inches of where he lay. The island, then, must obviously be inhabited. He raised his eyes defiantly.

He could not have explained what he had expected to see — some grinning, paint-raddled savage, perhaps, or else the prim, concerned face of a missionary in white ducks, or, perhaps, a dark-skinned native girl in a wreath of flowers. He saw actually none of these, his gaze encountering a shorter, stranger form — that of an elderly, dwarfish man in what he at first supposed to be some sort of fancy dress. Comical clothes! He gaped at the short, jaunty jacket, the nankeen trousers, the hard, round hat, and, most singular of all, a thin and ratty pigtail protruding from beneath the brim of this same hat. The little man returned his scrutiny calmly, with an air of complete nonchalance; he revealed a turnip face blotched thick with freckles, a loose mouth that twitched mechanically from time to time, and little piggish, filmy blue eyes.

‘Good God,’ said Patterson at length, ‘who are you, and where did you appear from?’

The little man asked, in a rusty voice proceeding from deep in his throat:

‘Have you tobacco?’

‘If I had it’d be no use to you. Do you realize I swam here?’

‘You swam? From where?’

There was silence for a moment, a silence broken only by the breaking of the surf and by the harsh cry of birds, as Patterson, more exhausted than he had first supposed, tried idiotically to remember to what strange port the yacht, *Seagull*, had been bound.

He said at length:

'I - we were on our way to Madeira. The Southern Atlantic. The yacht - a petrol-boat - caught fire. And so I swam ashore.'

'Petrol?' the man replied, puzzled. 'I know nothing of that. As for the Southern Atlantic, I myself was marooned on these shores deliberate, many and many a year ago, when bound for Kingston, Jamaica.'

'Rather out of your course, weren't you?'

The little man was silent, staring reflectively out to sea. Patterson, naturally observant, was immediately struck by the look in those small, filmy blue eyes - a singular fixed immobility of regard, at once empty and menacing, a glassy, almost dead expression in which was reflected all the vast space of the ocean on which he gazed, and something else, too, more elusive, harder to define, some curious quality of concentration that, refusing to be classified, nevertheless repelled. He asked:

'What's your name?'

'Heywood. And yours?'

'Patterson. Are you alone here?'

The narrow blue eyes shifted, slipped from the sea to Patterson's face, and then dropped.

'Alone? No; there are four of us.'

'And were they also marooned?'

As he uttered this last word he was conscious that it reflected the twentieth century even less than did the costume of his companion. Perhaps he was still light-headed after his ordeal. He added quickly:

'Were they also bound for Jamaica?'

'No,' Heywood answered briefly.

'And how long,' Patterson pursued laboriously, 'have you been on the island?'

'That,' said his companion, after a pause, 'is a mighty big question. Best wait before you ask it. Or, better still, ask it, not of me, but of the Captain.'

'You're damned uncivil. Who's the Captain?'

'Another castaway, like ourselves. And yet not, perhaps, so much alike. Yonder, behind the palms on the cliff, is his hut.'

'I wouldn't mind going there. Will you take me?'

'No,' said Heywood in a surly tone.

'Good God!' exclaimed Patterson. 'I shall believe you if you tell me they marooned you for your ill-manners. I've swum about eight miles, and need rest and sleep. If you've a hut, then take me to it.'

'The captain'll bide no one in his hut but himself and one other person. That person is not myself.'

'Then where do you sleep? In the trees, like the baboons I hear chattering on the hill?'

'No,' Heywood answered, still looking out to sea. 'I've a comrade in my hut, which is small, since I built it for myself. A comrade who was flung ashore here when a great ship struck an iceberg.'

'An iceberg?' Patterson's attention was suddenly arrested. 'An iceberg in these regions? Are you trying to make a fool of me, or have you been here so long that your wits are going? And, by the way, tell me this: how do you try to attract the attention of passing ships? Do you light bonfires, or wave flags?'

'No ships pass,' said Heywood.

There was another silence. It was almost dark; already the deep iris of the sky was pierced by stars, and it was as though a silver veil had been dragged across the glitter of the ocean. Behind them, on the cliffs, two lights winked steadily. Patterson judged these to proceed from the huts mentioned by his companion. Then came the sound of soft footsteps, and there were no longer two shadows there on the dusky sands, but three.

'Hallo, stranger!' said a casual voice.

Patterson turned abruptly to distinguish in the greyness a sharp, pale face with a shock of tousled hair. A young man, gaunt-looking and eager, clad normally enough in a dark sweater and trousers.

'And this is a hell of a nice island, I don't think,' the stranger pursued, thrusting his hands into his pockets. He had a strong Cockney accent. Patterson was enchanted by the very prosaicness of his appearance; he brought with him sanity; walking as he did on faery moon-drenched shores he was blessed, being the essence of the commonplace.

'Name of Judd. Dicky Judd. I suppose you're all in. Been swimming, ain't you?'

'Yes. And this fellow Heywood won't take me to his hut. Says it's full. Can you do anything about it?'

'You bet,' said Judd. 'Follow me, and I'll give you a bite of supper and a doss for the night. This way – the path up the cliff. We'll leave Heywood to the moon. Come on.'

Ten minutes later, Patterson was eating fried fish and yams in a log-hut, with an open fireplace and two hammocks swung near the rude doorway. He had noticed, as they climbed the slope together, a grander, more commodious hut built a few hundred yards away amongst some shady palms. This, he surmised, must be the home of the elusive Captain. No sound came from it, but a light burned in the narrow window. As he ate his food he speedily forgot the existence of these fellow-castaways. He asked instead, gulping down water and wishing it were brandy:

'How did you come here, Judd? With the others?'

Judd eyed him swiftly. For one second Patterson imagined that he detected in the merry greenish eyes of his companion the fixed, almost petrified expression that had so much perplexed him in the gaze of Heywood. If he was right, this expression vanished in a flash, yet Judd seemed to withdraw himself, to become curiously remote, as he answered coolly:

'Not I. I came here after them – some time after.'

'Do you mean that, like me, you were the only survivor from your ship?'

'That's about it,' Judd answered, with his mouth full.

'Tell me about it.'

'Oh . . . there's nothing much to tell. She was a great liner – I had a berth aboard her – and she struck an iceberg in mid-Atlantic. There was not room for me in the boats, so I jumped. . . . But she was a lovely ship, and big as a city. *Titanic*, they called her.'

'You're pulling my leg. And for Heaven's sake chuck it – I've had about enough for one day.'

'Strewth, I'm not!' Judd told him energetically. 'But no matter. You don't have to believe it.'

And he whistled, picking his teeth.

Patterson asked with a shiver:

'Look here, joking apart, do you mean to tell me that you

honestly believe you were cast ashore here from the wreck of the *Titanic*?

'On my oath,' said Judd. He added, jumping up: 'Bugs is bad here tonight. Wait while I swat a few.'

'Just answer this,' Patterson interrupted. 'Why in Heaven's name, when you think you were wrecked in mid-Atlantic, should you have landed here on a tropical island off the African coast? Bit of a miracle that, wasn't it?'

Judd was silent for a moment, flicking at the mosquitoes with a palm-leaf fan. He said at length, sucking his teeth:

'Not being a seafaring man, I take it, you don't happen to have heard a fairy-story told among sailor-boys all the world over – story of a mirage island that floats about the seas near wrecks bent on collecting castaways?'

Patterson thought desperately: 'This man's as mad as Heywood, and that's saying a lot. . . . And I've got to live with them . . .' Aloud he said: 'No, I've never heard that one. But there's one other thing I want to ask you. . . . Who's this Captain that Heywood was talking about? Has he been here for many years?'

'I'll give you this goatskin for a blanket,' said Judd, 'and you can doss near the doorway, where it's cooler. So you know about the Captain?'

'I've only heard his name. I asked you, has he been here for long?'

'Many years,' answered Judd, with a peculiar inflection.

'Tell me more about him.'

Judd laughed.

'You don't want to know much, do you? You'll clap eyes tomorrow on Captain Thunder, late of the barque, *Black Joke*, well known (he's always boasting) from Barbados to Trinidad and back again. But you may whistle for the Captain tonight!'

Patterson was sleepy.

'Sounds like a buccaneer,' he muttered into the goatskin, and was soon unconscious, oblivious even of Heywood's noisy entry into the hut.

By early morning the island's beauty seemed more exotic even than the radiant plumage of the parakeets darting to and fro in the dim green light of airy tree-tops. Patterson was refreshed

after a good night's sleep, and consequently less depressed. He bathed with Judd, leaving Heywood snoring in his hammock. The beach was a shining snowdrift, the sea a vast tapestry of hyacinth veined and streaked with foam, glowing, glittering in the brilliant sunlight.

They swam for twenty minutes and then lay basking on the sands.

'Hungry?' Judd inquired.

So delicious was the morning that Patterson had quite forgotten the eccentricity manifested by his comrades the previous evening. Rolling over on his stomach, he was about to reply in an enthusiastic affirmative, when he surprised once more in his companion's gaze that bleak, fey look that had already disconcerted him. He could not understand it, yet it was as though a sombre shadow fled across the beach, obscuring this gay and vivid world of amber sunshine, creaming surf, tossing sea and glowing, brilliant blossom. Beauty was blotted out when Judd, the commonplace, looked like that; he felt suddenly lonely, humble and scared.

'Judd,' he said suddenly, and Judd wrenched away his eyes from the horizon.

'Judd, listen and please tell me the truth. Just what are our chances of getting away from here?'

Judd eyed him thoughtfully.

'If you want the truth, we haven't any. Sorry, and all that, but there it is.'

'Rubbish!' said Patterson. 'A ship will surely pass one day. Just because you've had bad luck...'

'No ships pass,' Judd told him.

'Rubbish again! Look how close mine came yesterday. The trouble with you, Judd, is that you've been here too long, and got into a rut. I don't believe you care much whether you're rescued or not. Now, I do. And I'll tell you my plans—'

'Listen a minute,' said Judd. He propped himself up on his elbow, avoided his companion's eyes, and resumed: 'You might as well hear it now. No sense in keeping it from you, although you'll think I'm nutty. Listen, then, Patterson. We're here for keeps. Get that? Look at the Captain and his friend; look at Heywood. If I told you how long they'd been here you wouldn't swallow it, and I'd not blame you. But you've got to know some

time – we're here *for ever*. Now I feel better.'

Patterson shuddered in the blazing sunshine.

'Do you really think we've got to stick this until we die?'

Judd flung a pebble at a pearly cloud of seagulls.

'Worse than that, Patterson. Worse by a long chalk. I told you last night this island was mirage, magic. Stands to reason it is, floating round the world picking survivors from shipwrecks in all the Seven Seas. Well, there's something worse than that – much worse – and I'm going to tell you what it is. There's no death on this island. Death forgets us. We're here for all eternity.'

Patterson laughed nervously.

'You should be in Bedlam, Judd. I suppose a few years' desert-island does that to one. But look here, now I've come to join you, we'll get away somehow, I promise you that.'

Judd slipped on his trousers.

'You don't believe me, and small blame to you. I was like that once. But it's true. I swear to God it is. There's no death here. For the animals and birds, yes, or we should starve. But not for us. We're here for all eternity, and you may as well make the best of it.'

Patterson, trying to dress himself, found that his hands were trembling. Yet he tried to be reasonable.

'Look here, Judd, what put this crazy idea into your head?'

'Do you know,' Judd replied, 'how long Heywood's been here? Of course you don't; I'll tell you. He was marooned in eighteen twenty-five. It's nineteen thirty-two now, isn't it? Add that up for yourself. As for the Captain, he's had a long spell. He was a pirate, one of those Spanish Main fellows I read about when I was a kid. His crew mutinied in July, seventeen ninety-five. Another sum for you, if you're quick at figures.'

'Very interesting,' Patterson commented idiotically.

'Don't you imagine,' Judd continued, 'that we haven't all of us tried to escape in the past? We've built rafts and boats – they've always been chucked back here on the beach by mysterious tidal waves or tempests. Then we've tried to kill ourselves and one another – we've been wounded and lain sick for weeks with mosquitoes battenning on our wounds, and our wounds have festered, but we've pulled through. Now we don't do that any more. Too much pain for nothing. You always pull through in the end.'

We've tried to drown, and swallowed quarts of water, but have always been flung back on the sands here. Death's not for us - we've jolly well found that out. And so we make the best of it. It's all right after a time. You live for eating and sleeping, and you blooming well don't think. Sometimes you go mad, but in the long run you get sane again. And you kowtow to the Captain, who's got twice the guts of anyone. And, oh, yes, your clothes last just as you last. Funny, isn't it?

'What about breakfast?' suggested Patterson.

'I knew you'd think me loopy,' said Judd. 'All right, come on back to the hut.'

They scrambled to their feet, and there was an awkward constraint between them. Then Patterson pulled Judd's arm.

'What's that? Look, over there! Is that another confounded mirage?'

Judd screwed up his eyes. Beside the rocks, where seaweed flourished like green moss, a woman stood, skirts kilted in her hand. She was barefoot, and sprang from one rock to another, with the grace and agility of a deer. She was gathering mussels. As she worked she sang, and the drowsy, bell-like sweetness of her voice was wafted faintly to their ears all mingled with the cry of seagulls.

'Oh, that,' said Judd. 'Well, you'd better remember to act respectful when she's about. That's Doña Inés, the Captain's girl. She was his prisoner; he had her with him on his boat when the crew of the *Black Joke* mutinied, and they were cast up here together. At least, they both say so. First she hated him, then loved him for forty years or so, and since then, for about a hundred years, she's been fed up, but he's still keen on her. So keep away, that's my advice. Once Heywood went snooping after her, and the Captain cut his throat. He'd have died elsewhere, of course, and he suffered the tortures of hell, he told me. He'll show you the scar if you're interested.'

'Wait,' said Patterson, 'you've given me a turn with your crazy talk, and she's coming towards us. There's no harm, I suppose, in speaking to her?'

'None, as long as you're respectful.'

They waited there on the beach while the woman approached them. She was young, about twenty, and extremely handsome.

She wore a stiff, flowing skirt of burning crimson, and a little jacket of orange. Her dark, rippling hair hung like a black plume down her back, and her oval, vivid face was delicately modelled, with high cheekbones, a mouth like red blossom, and immense velvety-brown eyes. She was Spanish, of course, and well bred; her wrists were fragile, exquisite, her bare feet slender and arched. Her body was lithe, graceful and voluptuous; she moved swiftly, as though she danced, and as she drew near to the two men, a sudden soft breeze blew a lock of floating ebony hair across the fire and sweetness of her mouth.

Patterson was dazed; he had encountered much superstition during the course of the morning, his stomach was empty, and he was but ill-prepared for such beauty.

Doña Inés said gaily, speaking fluent, attractive English:

‘Good morning to you, *señor*. I heard last night of your arrival, but was not allowed to greet you, as I so much desired. Please forgive my execrable manners. We shall see so much of one another that it would be as well to start our acquaintance on friendly terms.’

Patterson pulled himself together and kissed her hand, a long delicate hand all dusky-tanned with the sun. A large diamond glared from the third finger.

‘Morning, Inés,’ said Judd casually. ‘Where’s the Captain?’

‘Micah?’ She became suddenly indifferent. ‘Waiting for his breakfast, I suppose. I must go to him. Shall we walk up the hill together?’

And so they went, and the Doña Inés moved lightly between them, all bright and flaming in her gaudy clothes, and told Patterson that he must accustom himself to this idea of eternity. After the first hundred years these things mattered little enough.

‘As well be here, laughing and walking in the sunshine as in our graves. Don’t you think so, *señor*? And I, who am talking to you, have so much experience of these things. Why, haven’t I lived here with Micah Thunder for near on a hundred and forty years? And it might be yesterday that he sacked Santa Ana, he and his fleet, and took me prisoner when I was on my knees at Mass, and swore that I should be his woman. And so I was, both here and on his ship. But I have almost forgot the ship, and

Santa Ana, too. Now there is only the island, and yet I am not a stricken woman, am I, nor yet a day older than when cast upon these shores?’

And so she prattled, her dark eyes flashing like jewels, until she and the two men came to the clearing where were the two huts, and there, in front of the smaller one, sat Heywood, surly as ever, eating.

‘Good-bye *senor*,’ said Doña Inés. ‘We will meet later, when I have fed my Captain.’

Patterson sat down on the ground and said nothing.

‘Here’s orange-juice,’ said Judd, ‘and custard-apples, and some cornbread I baked myself. No butter – we don’t rise to that – but, all the same, we’ll dine on oysters.’

Patterson ate in silence. He supposed himself to be hungry. And he thought that he was in a nightmare, and would wake soon with the steward shaking him, and find himself once more in a gay, chintz-hung cabin of the *Seagull*, with bacon and eggs waiting in the dining-saloon. But he did not wake.

‘I’ll help you rig up a tent after breakfast,’ said Judd. ‘I’ve got some sailcloth. It’ll last you for a few days, and then you can build a hut for yourself.’

Heywood, eating ravenously, said nothing, but eyed him in silence.

‘I wish,’ he thought desperately, ‘they wouldn’t stare like that.’

And suddenly he knew of what their fixed eyes reminded him. They were like dead men in the way they gazed. Glassy and vacant, their eyes were as the eyes of corpses. Perhaps their fantastic stories were true, and he had in reality been cast for all eternity upon a mirage island.

‘Oh, Lord,’ he thought. ‘I’m getting as crazy as the rest of them. And yet the woman, the Spanish woman, seemed sane enough, and she believes their tales.’

After breakfast he worked at putting up his tent, sweating in the copper glare of the sun, while Heywood went fishing and Judd vanished into the woods with a bow and arrow. No sound came from the other hut. When he had finished erecting his tent, Patterson lay down in the shade inside it, and found himself craving for a cigarette with a passionate, abnormal longing. It was stuffy in the tent, and mosquitoes clustered round his hot face.

He shut his eyes and tried to sleep, but sleep evaded him. And then, as he lay quietly in the oppressive darkness, his instincts, already sharpened by twenty-four hours' adventure, warned him that someone was watching him. He opened his eyes.

Outside, regarding him impassively, stood a small, slim man in dainty, dandified clothes of green-blue shot taffeta. These garments, consisting of a full-skirted, mincing coat and close-fitting breeches, were smeared with dirt, and seemed to Patterson highly unsuited to desert-island life. The little man wore cascades of grubby lace dripping from his wrists, and rusty buckles on his pointed shoes. He bore himself like a dancing-master, and had no wig, which seemed odd to Patterson, who gaped at a gingery, close-shaven head revealing glimpses of bare skull like pinkish silk. The face of this man was long and narrow and candle-pale, with thin, dry lips and pointed ears. His flickering, expressionless eyes were green as flames; he blinked them constantly, showing whitish, sandy lashes. His hands were long, blanched, and delicate, more beautiful than a woman's, and he wore on one finger a huge diamond ring, the twin to that other stone blazing upon the finger of Doña Inés. Patterson, disconcerted by the cold, unwavering eyes, scrambled to his feet and held out his hand. It was ignored, but the Captain bowed gracefully.

'Captain Micah Thunder, late of the *Black Joke*, and at your service.'

He spoke in a high, affected, mincing voice.

'I have already,' Patterson told him, 'heard talk of you, Captain Thunder, and am, therefore, delighted to have this opportunity of meeting you.'

'You're a damned liar,' replied Captain Thunder, with a giggle. 'My fame, I understand, has not, through some absurd mischance, been handed down through the ages, or so Judd informs me. They talk, I hear, of Flint and Kidd - even of Blackbeard, most clumsy bungler of all - but not of Thunder. And that, you know, is mighty odd, for without any desire to boast, I can only assure you, my young friend, that in the three years preceding the mutiny of my crew I was dreaded in all ports as the Avenger of the Main, and, indeed, I recollect taking during that period more than thirty merchantmen.'

He sighed, giggled once more, and shook out the lace ruffles of his cuffs.

'Indeed, sir?' said Patterson respectfully. To himself he thought, in a sudden panic: 'I must humour this man; he's worse than any of them.'

For the Captain, his conical, shaven head, his long, pale face, his deprecating giggle, his cold, greenish eyes and high, affected voice, seemed as he minced there in the sunshine most terribly like an animated corpse coquetting, grotesquely enough, in all the parrot-sheen of silken taffetas and frothing lace. This creature, this little strutting jackanapes, so bleached and frozen and emasculated, looked, indeed, as though a hundred and more years of living on the island had drained away his very life-blood, leaving a dummy, a vindictive posturing dummy, clad in fine raiment, staring perpetually out to sea with greenish, fishy eyes. And something, perhaps the very essence of evil itself, a breath of cold and effortless vice, emanated from him to stink in Patterson's nostrils like a rank and putrid smell. The odour of decay, perhaps; the very spirit of decay, for surely, in spite of sanity and common sense, this man should long ago have rotted, not in a coffin, but rather from a gibbet on Execution Dock.

And Doña Inés, creeping up softly behind him, seemed brighter, gayer than a humming bird, in contrast to her pale pirate. Receiving a signal from her eye, he knew that he must make no mention of an earlier meeting.

'My mistress, Doña Inés Samaniegos, of Santa Ana,' announced the Captain, with a flourish.

And the lady, very grave and beautiful, ran her hand lightly over the Captain's sleeve and swept a curtsy, deep and billowing. She was not merry now, neither was she barefoot; she seemed haughty, and had shod herself in high-heeled, red shoes.

'This flower,' said Captain Thunder casually, indicating his paramour with a flick of white finger, 'springs from a proud and splendid Castilian family. Is it not so, my heart? I took her when my fleet sacked Santa Ana, finding her myself, when my hands were steeped in blood above the wrists, praying in terror before a waxen, tinselled image of the Virgin. She was sixteen, and very timid, being fresh from convent. Before I wooed I was forced to tame her. When I had tamed her, I was still enamoured, and for four years she sailed the Main as queen of my fleet. The *Black Joke*, my ship, and the Black Lady, as they called my woman (being accustomed to flaxen peasant maids from Devon), those

were all I prized in my life. My ship they took, my woman I have kept, and will continue to keep whilst we remain here.'

The drawling voice was icy now, and the light eyes had become green stones. Patterson realized that he was being warned. He answered lightly:

'And may I congratulate you, Captain, upon a lovely and most glorious prize?'

'Do you mind,' said the Captain to Doña Inés, 'when that little ape, Heywood, tried to take you, and I slit his throat?'

She nodded, her eyes very dark and lustrous.

The Captain turned to Patterson.

'There is no death on this island, sir, as you will discover for yourself, but it is possible to fight, and fighting, to inflict wounds. A sorry business, very. I declare I regretted it, when I saw the poor creature gurgling in mortal agony. He was sick for many days. But, sooner or later, we all heal. However, I'm soft hearted, once my rage is appeased. And now you will pray excuse me, while I seek the shade. I'll leave madam here to entertain you for ten minutes. A change for her, a pleasant interlude for yourself. In ten minutes, then, my dove?'

Bowing, he retreated, walking away with pointed toes, more like a dancing-master than ever.

When he was out of earshot Patterson said impulsively:

'I'm not enamoured of your Captain!'

'And I,' she said thoughtfully, 'was once enamoured of him for forty years.'

'And now?' Patterson wanted to know.

'Now?' She scooped up some sand and let it sift through her fingers. 'Oh, my poor young man, does anyone remain in love for all eternity? Do you really believe that pretty legend?'

'Then you hate him?'

'Hate? No. You can neither hate nor love for a hundred years. I have suffered both, so I know, and tried to kill myself three times. Oh, yes, there is not much that I cannot tell you about love. One does not live as long as I have without learning wisdom.'

'And please tell me, Doña Inés,' begged Patterson, 'what you have learned about life in a hundred and forty years.'

'A hundred and sixty,' she corrected. 'I was twenty when cast up here. What have I learned? One thing above all - to live

without emotion. Love, hate, tedium, those are all words, very unimportant words. They are nothing. I like to eat when I am hungry, sleep when I am tired, swim when the sun is hot. All that is good, because it is just enough. I used to think – I never think now. I was mad, you know, for a little time, five years or so, because I thought too much. But soon I was cured. That was when, having loved Micah and hated him, at last he sickened me. I imagined I could not bear that. But you see I was wrong.'

She laughed, shaking back a tress of hair, and he knew that, with death, she had also lost her soul and her humanity. She was, as she had said, empty, drained of all emotion; she was as sterile mentally, this lovely lady, as the parakeets chattering above her head. But she was very beautiful.

'And the Captain?' he inquired. 'Is it rude to ask what are his feelings towards you?'

'Indeed, no!' And she laughed again. 'The Captain is still a man, although he should have been dead long ago. Being a man, he has need of a woman sometimes. Being a man, he is determined that other men shall not take that woman. That is all. Apart from that, like us all, he is petrified.'

And then, although the ten minutes were not up, she heard Judd coming up the hill and slipped like a bright shadow to her own hut.

Days passed slowly on the island. One day was like another. Always the sun poured brilliantly upon sapphire seas, gleaming sands, jewelled foliage. Macaws flashed like darting rainbows through the dusky green of jungle arches, the fruit hung coral-bright from trees whose blossoms flung out trailing creepers gayer, more gaudy, than the patterns of vivid Spanish shawls. And yet it seemed to Patterson after two months that all this radiant beauty was evil and poisoned, like a sweet fruit rotten at the core. What should have been paradise was only a pretty hell. Slowly, reluctantly he had been forced to accept the island for what it was according to his comrades. He now believed, although shamefacedly, that Thunder and Doña Inés had lived there since the mutiny of the *Black Joke*, that Heywood had been marooned in the last century for insubordination, that Judd had emerged from the wreck of the *Titanic*. And yet, obstinately, he still clung to the idea of escape. One day he would escape. And

then, once away from the island's shores, he would regain mortality, he would wrap mortality about him like a cloak.

Meanwhile, he noticed one or two curious facts. His clothes, after eight weeks' rough living, were almost as good as new. It was no longer necessary for him to shave more than once a week. And, once, Judd, climbing a palm in search of coconuts, had slipped, crashing onto his head to what seemed certain death fifty feet below and had been picked up suffering from nothing worse than slight concussion. This accident shook his faith more than anything else that he saw.

They lived comfortably enough on fish, home-baked bread, fruit, coconuts, and the flesh of young pigs found in the jungle. Patterson learned to shoot with a bow and arrow, and to tell the time by the sun and stars. He learned to be patient with Heywood, who was half-witted, and he learned to search for turtles' eggs in a temperature of ninety-nine in the shade. He learned, too, to treat Captain Thunder with respect and Doña Inés with formality.

Sometimes, the Captain, a reserved, sour-tempered man, would unbend, and, fingering his cutlass, tell stories of his life as a buccanneer on the Spanish Main. Terrible stories, these vile, filthy, sadistic stories of murder and vice, plunder and torture, and fiendish, cold-blooded, ferocious revenge. Told in his drawling, affected voice, they became nauseous, and yet Doña Inés listened peacefully enough, her dark eyes soft and velvety, her red, silken mouth calmer than an angel's. Sometimes she would look up and nod, and say:

'Oh, yes, Micah; I remember that, don't I? I was with you then, wasn't I?'

'You were, my dove, my heart. If you remember, I burnt your hand in the flame of my candle until you swooned, because you affronted me by asking mercy for those dogs.'

And she would laugh.

'I was foolish, was I not, Micah? For what did it matter?'

Patterson, loathing these conversations, was, nevertheless, forced to listen because at night there was really nothing else to do. Always before in his life he had accepted books without question as being quite naturally part of his life; now that he had none, the lack of them appalled him. He tried to write, scratching a diary on strips of bark, but the effort was not successful.

Nor did his companions do much to ameliorate the loneliness of his situation. He preferred Judd to the others because Judd was young and gay, and comparatively untouched by the sinister, dragging life of the island, yet there were times when even Judd seemed to withdraw himself, to become watchful, remote, secretive. Patterson learned to recognize these as the interludes when his friend, pitifully afraid, thought in a panic of the future that lay ahead for him.

Heywood was sulky and monosyllabic. The Captain, so cynical and depraved, with his vicious mind, his giggle, and his will of iron, had revolted Patterson from the first. Only Doña Inés, with her vivid face and her beautiful, empty, animal mind, seemed to him restful and gracious, like some handsome, well-behaved child, in this crazy world of sunshine and plenty and despair. For this reason she began to haunt him at night, so that he was unable to sleep, and he longed not so much to make love to her as to rest his head against her and to feel her cool hand upon his forehead, soothing him, that he might forget for a few hours. But Doña Inés was watched so carefully that it seemed impossible to speak to her alone.

And then one day, when he had been on the island for more than three months and was in a mood of black depression, he encountered her in the woods.

He had wandered there in search of shade, aimless, solitary, and discontented. She was gathering moss, on her knees, her bright skirts kilted. Stars of sunlight, dripping through the green and matted tent of foliage, cast flickering, dappled shadows upon the amber of her neck and arms. When she heard his footsteps, she turned to look at him, smiling very wisely, her head turned to one side.

'May I speak to you,' he asked her, 'without being snarled at by the Captain?'

'But of course,' she said. 'Micah and Heywood went out an hour ago to fish on the other side of the island.'

He sat down beside her on the green froth of the moss.

'Inés,' he began, and he had never called her by her name before. 'I wonder if you will be patient and listen to me for a moment?'

She nodded, saying nothing; she was never very glib of words.

'It's this,' he said, encouraged; 'perhaps, being so much wiser,

you can help me. . . . It's a bad day with me; I've got the horrors. Today I believe all your crazy stories, and, try as I will, I can't escape from them. . . . Today I feel the island shutting me in, and I want to run away from the island. What am I to do?

'You must begin,' she told him, 'by making yourself more stupid than you are. Oh, it was easy for Heywood, more easy even for Judd. For you it is very difficult. Can you not think only of today? Must you let your mind race on ahead?'

Her voice was murmurous and very soft. He said, after a pause:

'It would be easier, I think, if I might talk to you more often. Time, the time of the island, has touched you scarcely at all. With you one almost ceases to feel the horror.'

'If it were not for Micah, I would talk to you, yes, whenever you want. But you know how I am situated.'

'Oh, don't think I'm trying to make love to you,' he told her impatiently, 'it's not that. It's only that you bring me peace - you're so beautiful, so restful.'

Doña Inés was silent. He said, after another pause:

'Perhaps that wasn't very polite of me. In fact, it was clumsily expressed. Let me try once more - listen, Inés, you're sanity, loveliness, a bright angel in a mad world. I respect you as I would respect a saint. But I want to be with you, I want to talk with you. I'm lonely when you're not there - I need your protection.'

Doña Inés looked away from him towards the green twilight of the trees. His eyes devoured her dark clear-cut profile. She said at length, speaking very slowly in her grave, beautiful voice:

'*Mi querido*, I can't grant your request. I am too afraid of Micah, and perhaps I am afraid of something else. . . . Listen, if I saw much of you, I might forget that I should be a dead woman. I might forget that my heart is cold and my mind empty. I might wake up again, and I don't want to wake up. I am afraid of life, after so many years. And already you are making my sleep a little restless.'

She turned her face towards him and he saw that the red flower of her mouth was trembling. A bright drop, that might have been a tear, save that she never wept, hung like a jewel upon the shadow of her lashes. Yet her face was radiant, transfigured, more sparkling than the sunshine.

Straightway, Patterson forgot about respect and saints and

Captain Thunder, and kissed her on the lips.

For one enchanted moment she was acquiescent, then pushed him away, hiding her face in her hands. And he, realizing the horror that lay ahead for both, felt more like weeping than rejoicing.

'Go away,' she whispered, 'go away before you make me hate you for what you are doing. A moment ago you talked of peace: do you realize that you are stealing mine?'

He stammered, scarcely knowing what he said:

'There are better dreams.'

'Not here,' she told him; 'here there are no dreams but bad ones, and so it is safer not to dream at all. Please, please, go away.'

'Inés,' he said eagerly, 'I *will* go away – we'll both go away. If I build a boat, or a raft, and provision her, will you trust yourself to me? We'll escape – we may drown, but I promise you—'

He stopped. In her tired yet vivid eyes he had suddenly surprised, for the first time, the dead, haunted look that so much disconcerted him when he glimpsed it in the other's gaze. It was as if she retreated very far away, drawing down a blind.

She said, patiently, as one speaking to a child:

'Oh, my friend, please don't be so foolish. . . . I have tried, we have all tried, so many times. And it hurts, to fail so often.'

'Then you won't come?'

She climbed slowly to her feet, brushing moss from her bright skirts. Then she shook her black, silken head twice, very emphatically.

'No. I will not come with you.'

'Then,' said Patterson, 'since I can't stay here to watch you with the Captain, I shall escape alone. Won't you change your mind?'

She came near to him and put her hand for one moment upon his shoulder.

'No. I'll not change my mind.'

And with a swishing of silk, that sounded strange enough in that tropical, emerald glade, she left him to his thoughts, and his thoughts were agony.

For weeks he slaved in secret to build a great rakish-looking solid raft that grew slowly into shape as it lay concealed amid the dusky green of overhanging branches. He had told no one save

Doña Inés of his resolution to escape. The reason was simple; in his heart of hearts he dreaded their bitter mockery, their cynical disbelief in any possible salvation from the trap of the island. Yet he still had faith; once aboard his raft and he would be for ever borne away from these perilous and beckoning shores; he might find death, but this he did not really mind, although he much preferred the thought of life, human life, life with Inés. And then he had to remind himself that the Spanish woman was a thing of dust, to crumble away at the first contact with normal humanity, and that he would, in any event, be better without her, since she meant another mouth to feed.

But he still desired her, and it was as though the Captain knew, for she was very seldom left alone. And so he toiled in secret, and in his spare time nursed Judd, who lay sick of a poisonous snake-bite that swelled his foot, and turned it black, and would have meant death in any other land.

Once, when his raft was nearly completed, he caught Inés alone on the beach, where, against a background of golden rock, she fed a swirling silver mass of seagulls. The birds wheeled, crying harshly, and Doña Inés smiled. She wore a knot of scarlet passion-flowers in the dark satin of her hair. Patterson, determined not to miss a second alone with her, advanced triumphantly across the sands. The seagulls scattered.

'Look, you've frightened my birds,' she complained indignantly.

'Never mind the birds - they can see you whenever they want. I can't. Inés, haven't you changed your mind about coming with me?'

She shook her head.

'Inés, please, *please* listen! Even if we drown out there together, wouldn't it be better than this?'

'Oh, yes, if we drowned. But we should not drown. We should come back here - to Micah - and then our lives would not be worth living.'

'My life,' he said, 'isn't worth living now, not while I have to see you with that creature night and day.'

'Be quiet,' she warned in a low voice.

Patterson turned, followed her eyes. Behind, only just out of earshot, stood the Captain, watching them sardonically. The breeze lifted the skirts of his green taffeta coat, ballooning them

about his slender body. The green, too, seemed reflected in his face, so pale was it; paler, more waxen, even, than a corpse-candle.

'Are you also feeding the birds, Patterson?' inquired the Captain softly.

'No. I am looking for turtles' eggs.'

'How many have you found?' the Captain wanted to know.

Patterson felt rather foolish.

'None - yet.'

'Then you had better make haste, unless you wish to fast for dinner. Come, my rose.'

And Captain Thunder turned away indifferently, followed by Doña Inés, who walked behind him obediently, her head bent, with no backward look.

That night Patterson thought he heard weeping in the hut that lay only a few hundred yards from his own, and he crouched, perspiring, sleepless, for many hours, until it was dark no longer, and bars of rose and lemon streaked the sky. Then he got up and went forth to the woods to complete his preparations for escape.

He had rigged up a sail upon his raft and had already floated her on a narrow lagoon that led towards the sea. He was taking with him three barrels of water, a barrel of bread, his fishing-tackle, a blanket, and a flint and tinder. He knew he would not starve, since fish were plentiful, but he was aware that he would, probably, unless he were fortunate enough to end in a shark's belly, die of a thirst that must endure for many days of torment in a pitiless and scorching heat.

Yet he could not wait; he must start at once, before the sun was up, before the first signs of life from that hut nestling on the cliffs behind him. And so, at a moment's notice, he took his departure, nervous and weary and taut with anxiety, drifting with his raft like some dark bird against the misty violet-blue of the lagoon at dawn.

Everything was silent; trees and cliff and sky, the limpid reflection of these in the glassy waters of the lagoon; even the monkeys and the chattering parakeets, all were frozen into a breathless silence that seemed to watch, aghast, the reckless departure of this creature determined at all costs to break away from their sorrowful eternity.

Soon it was daylight, and the sun beat gilded wings, and Patterson drew near to the sea. A curve in the lagoon showed him the tawny cliff, and above it the huts. From the Captain's hut came a finger of blue smoke that climbed, very straight, into the bright clearness of the air.

'Good-bye, Inés.'

And he was surprised to find how little pain there was for him in this parting. He reminded himself once more that she was a ghost, a creature of dust.

He passed the rocks and was soon outside, away from the island, on the sea itself. The ripples danced, whitecrested, as though laced with silver. Patterson fished with success. He tried to fry his breakfast and, failing, devoured it half-raw, with a hunk of bread. It was very appetizing. After breakfast he lay watching, with ecstasy, a stiff breeze swell his sail.

Already the island seemed to have receded. Patterson gazed with exultation at the coral-whiteness of its strand, the radiant green foliage of its trees. An hour before, and these had been loathsome to him; now that they belonged to the past he grimaced at them and waved his hand.

The raft drifted on.

The sea was kind to him that day, he thought, so innocent and gay and tinted like forget-me-nots. Despite himself, despite his almost certain death, he found his mind flitting towards England, and his life there, as though he were fated to be saved.

He turned towards the island, gleaming in the distance.

'Farewell!'

It was a cry of defiance.

And, then, in a moment, like thunder splintering from the sky, came sudden and shattering catastrophe. He was never very clear as to what actually occurred. All he knew was that from peace and beauty there emerged swift chaos. A wall of water, all towering solid green and ribbed with foam, reared suddenly from the tranquil seas to bar his path like some great ogre's castle arisen by magic, huge, destructive, carven of emerald. Then there was darkness and a tremendous roaring sound, and the raft seemed to back like a frightened horse. He heard the ripping of his sail and then he was pitched through the air and something seemed to split his head and he knew no more.

When he awoke, the sun beat hot upon his temples. He felt

sick, his limbs ached, and he groaned. He lay still, his eyes closed, and tried to remember what had happened. And then he heard a sound that might have been some dirge sighed by the breeze, a soft murmuring music that seemed to him familiar. He knew, then, that he was back upon the island. He had no need to open his eyes.

'Oh, God,' he sighed.

And the sweat trickled down his face.

And then, inevitably, sounding close in his ear, the sneering, hateful voice of Captain Thunder.

'Home so soon, my young friend? No, you would not believe, would you? You knew too much . . .'

Patterson made no sign of life. Back once more on the island. For all eternity . . . the island . . . and then the murmuring song swelled louder, louder, mocking him, laughing a little, as Inés had laughed when he had told her that he was going to escape. The song of the island! And he must hear it for ever! He opened his eyes to find the Captain looking at him cynically.

'Now that you understand there is no escape,' said the Captain, 'perhaps you will not take it amiss if I venture to criticize your manner towards Madam Inés . . .'

But Patterson was not listening.

One of the most unpleasant psychological experiences one can have is that associated with a high fever or delirium. Here normal thought processes go awry and one finds intruding into one's awareness strange unfamiliar material – the raw stuff of the nightmare. Gone is the friendly logic of our normal selves. In its place are the erratic values of the subconscious, strange reiterative paths of thought, vast and profound inconsequences of mental operation. For most of us this material is rarely sampled – while recovering from a general anaesthetic perhaps, or more commonly in the endless, helpless semi-conscious ramblings that frequently accompany influenza or similar feverish illnesses. Many writers have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to capture the structure of thought processes of this kind, which at the time they are experienced are immensely unsettling. The British author, Giles Gordon, has made one or two stabs at this tempting area, and in 'The Line-up on the Shore' has got closer than most to expressing the potentially inexpressible.

The Line-up on the Shore

by Giles Gordon

There is no distinction between the area where the film should be projected and the rest of the blackness.

In, out; in, out; breathe in, out; in, out.

The line-up on the shore, the beach. The edge of the beach. The sea beyond. Or dust, it could be dust. Even asphalt, if the haze is due to sun on tar. Whatever, the retina will interpret what it sees; or thinks it sees.

The figures are five-sixths of the way up the picture, if it is a picture. If, if, if. . . . A picture it is, of sorts. A picture of sorts it is. A photograph, maybe? A still and the film has stuck? A painting? Possibly, but unlikely – so the retina says, or doesn't say – but this may be due to the process of reproduction, or the surface upon which the image is reproduced. Certainly the name of the perpetrator of the image is a name recognized as a painter, if it is a name recognized at all. Which is, again, unlikely. A view from

the eye, with the eye reflected, the view refracted. A view which is . . . happening, actuality. Perhaps, perhaps. Take away the view, the associations; look elsewhere; and the line-up on the shore, the beach, is still the line-up on the shore.

There are fifty-eight of them. The image is rectangular, without a third dimension. All the figures (people: men and women) are about the same height. To a tenth of an inch, that is, which may or may not make the more approximation more specific. Which shows, probably, merely how far away from them we are. (You are, someone is.) But stuff the parenthesis; and over and above that there was a temptation to italicize the first four words of this sentence, the words that is before the semi-colon.

Fifty-eight of them, in your sight-line; and the head's eye view can accommodate no more in its vision, that is without moving the head. The head looking at them. Why do you (you, you, you . . .) look at them? NO! Not a question to be asked, not a question. If you, or you, are looking at them, you are looking at them. Objectivity is too subjective for it to be abused knowingly. And speculation is for those that know the answers.

Fifty-eight of them, then; and there may be more beyond the parallel, vertical sight-lines. To left and to right, not above and below. In the latter direction is only acres, acres, acres of sand. Or concrete. Or asphalt. Or dust. Or dirt. Or dead ground. Or space. Or space. Yes, space. They don't move towards you, or away from you. They don't hold hands. They don't move. This is no mirage. They seem to be so close together, one to the next, that at first look you assume, the retina assumes, that they are touching, must be touching. There is no contact, no contact of bodies. They are fifty-eight bodies, fifty-eight people, a few of them women. (That contradicts nothing said previously.) To begin with you assumed - why? Why? No, no. No questions; nor wrong answers - that they were all men, only men. Looking more closely, peering hard out you observed two, three, a few women. You couldn't be precise, not from that distance, this distance. Whatever that distance is; was; is.

They are moving. Now they are moving. No, they are still, stand still.

The perspective seems . . . funny.

There is no perspective.

The shadows, the area of each body in light, in shade seems unrealistic, haphazard even; to have nothing to do with the way in which light falls or would fall on the bodies. There are no shadows on the ground, and they have certainly not been painted out. (So dogmatic? Yes, there is a limit.) Perhaps the sun is immediately above the figures, but that may, only may, be impossible as there are fifty-eight of them. Perhaps there is a smudge of shadow at the feet of each of them, and it is only because of the angle between where you stand and their position (positions) that no shadow is apparent. Perhaps at this moment the sun is behind a cloud. Perhaps there is no sun, in which case there would be no shadow. The scene is bleak, whatever the cause; if the bleakness is attributable to a cause. The word is used meteorologically, not as a value judgment. Probably there is no sun. You don't want to spoil the scene, distort the image by looking upwards.

You stare at them, peer in. You think they breathe in, out; in, out; it is your breathing, your own. Mine. They are moving, they are. Towards you, the lot of them, all fifty-eight. Someone may have given an order. You heard nothing. As they move towards you as one line, one rectangle, there are fewer of them. The nearer they approach the fewer of them there are, though none have absconded, disappeared.

As a column they move, as a body. They are almost marching, perhaps they are marching. As one man, one person.

And you? You observe them, notice them without interest. No, with interest, but with detachment; having nothing else to do this moment, better or worse.

You are alone, in a crowd. Watching a crowd, which is not the same thing. At the same time on your own, not in a crowd.

They stop, suddenly, as if to a pre-arranged signal. They turn to the left, that is as you are looking at them. They are two-fifths of the way down the picture, if it is a picture. Which should give some idea of how far away they are now. If, if, if. . . .

They begin to run. They are running, feet up, heels up, knees up; but on the same spot. There is a reason why they run. You know that, but don't know the reason. It is important, this reason, as it is why they run; but more important is it that you see them run. They are no longer running on the same spot, though your eyes are still trained on the same area.

What are the limits of the powers of the human mind? How closely is the mind tied to the brain and body? These questions have been posed for millennia, with the speculative possibilities freely considered in literature. The notion that the mind is, in principle, limitless in its potential, and only suffers through being tediously handicapped with material equipment in the form of a lumbering body, is a tempting one. Might not the mind be capable of reaching out under certain circumstances (or given special training) to transcend the boundaries of space and time? While modern psychology and physiology support a view contrary to this, one small group of scientists, the so-called parapsychologists, claim to have evidence not only for telepathy, but also for precognition and psychokinesis (the ability of the mind to influence material objects at a distance). I tend myself to the trad view here, and suspect that the parapsychologists have not made, and are never likely to make, a satisfactory case. Nevertheless it is legitimate to speculate as to what might be the consequences of an extension of the reach of the mind beyond its present limits. In 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles', H. G. Wells explored this idea in an amusing but alarming way. In 'Below the Shadow', a hitherto unpublished story, Alex Hamilton provides a different slant, more horrific by far than Wells' whimsy.

Below the Shadow

by Alex Hamilton

Officially, no one left the office in the evening before 5.30. In fact, the rule was eroded. People put their coats on, made their faces up, giggled in the washroom, chatted and smoked in the corridors, any time from five o'clock onwards.

People either had not thought about, or had not noticed, the upsetting effect on Miller. The quarter-inch glass partition might have been fourteen feet thick and stone, but Miller could see everything through it.

'Might just as well be at home,' said Miller, 'all of them.'

'Put that out over the tannoy,' suggested Harris.

Miller came up behind Harris's chair and his scowl included even those who were still bunched over their work.

'Make more noise than a flock of starlings in search of a loo,' complained Miller.

'Starling yourself once,' said Harris.

He could say that: he was a Department Head. From anybody else it would have meant curtains.

Miller bellied himself off the back of Harris's chair with such violence that Harris was tightly compressed between chairback and desk. Harris swore and looked back reproachfully - then he shook his head and took a clean sheet of paper.

'I think,' said Miller, oblivious of the trouble he had made for his Department Head, 'I'll walk up the stairs tonight. And get a few names.'

'Issue a memo first,' advised Harris. 'All Department Heads. Walking up and down the stairs taking names will look petty. Why get yourself disliked?'

'If there's to be odium,' replied Miller sententiously, 'I'm the one to stand it. Department Heads mustn't feel I'm obliging them to be unpopular with their people. And frankly I don't think memos from the top penetrate the armour. So I shall strike at the soft underbelly.'

'Oh Christ!' exclaimed Harris. 'If it's the soft underbelly we're aiming at, let me stand clear till I get my tin hat on. I thought this was Cradock and Mather, but it seems I was wrong. It's unconditional surrender incorporated.'

'If you're too squeamish to watch ...'

'Squeamish!' echoed Harris, astonished, half-laughing.

'... you'd better perhaps put on your own coat with the tin hat, and be off home before the balloon goes up.'

'Balloon!' exploded Harris. His shoulders shook helplessly. He looked down on to his blotter. Like a gesture of resignation he swept the sheet of paper into his wastepaper basket. Then the smile went, as Miller tapped impatiently on the blotter with his pen. He looked directly into Miller's eyes.

'I'll go home when I want,' said Harris. 'Midday or midnight. Later, if I think it warrants it. Sooner, if I think it doesn't. I might catch the 6.32. But do you mind if it's the 6.12? If I miss it, I'll know who to thank for ...'

Miller's pen stopped tapping. 'For what?' he prompted.

Harris relaxed again. 'For the loan of a balloon,' he smiled.

Miller turned about abruptly and walked into his inner office. Claiming an outside line he dialled his wife.

'I don't know when I'll be home,' he told her.

'I know what that means when a man reaches the top in his job and only phones his wife to say that he's held up at the office.'

'You're dreaming.'

'I dream a lot these days. I dream about you. Left on my own I'm bound to dream, don't you think?'

'We'll have to find you an occupation,' said Miller, looking at his watch. He could hear somebody going down the stairs, feet clattering on the metal strips which protected them.

'Marriage is an occupation,' said Miller's wife.

Miller could see empty chairs.

'You put too many hours into it,' he told his wife, and hung up. He frowned. He had been coerced, he felt. He'd tried to be nice, ringing up. The little contretemps in the office would be a hold-up - might take an hour. Well, she hadn't wanted to know. Now he did not care if it were six hours. In fact, you could say she had put the idea of staying out in his head. She could sit at home and dream, then. He shuddered.

Another swift clatter on the stairs. And only five bloody eleven!

Miller was out and through the main office with long strides. Harris was out there with a checklist in his hands. Miller would not look at him. In that cave of fluorescence the rustle of nervous anticipation among nearly fifty people seemed to Harris like a convulsion of fear and hostility. Resentment overcame his loyal instincts. He made binoculars of his hands and focused the clock. Subdued laughter.

Miller stood by the openwork lift shaft. The stairs twisted round and round it. Looking down, Miller could see one of the creatures, in full flight. Pattering down, skipping down, glancing off the shiny walls, sometimes hanging on to the inner banister, handbag planing from the other outstretched arm. All steam up to escape!

They did not use the lift. They knew that put their chances up of meeting an executive. Like rats down a drainpipe, they scuttered down the stairway instead. Miller could not see who she

was, but she stopped suddenly, hearing him coming down after her, and he saw the white blob of her face looking upward. It made her mouth hang open – very ugly. He was sure it was one of the stockroom girls.

'The only time she's moved fast today,' thought Miller. And he would have to move even faster if he was to catch her, after having given her two floors' start. She must not give him the slip now – they would giggle over it all next day in the stockroom if she got clear. And she must be *proved* wrong too, once caught. He could not pursue, and then listen to excuses.

She would be made an example. Back upstairs, in full view of everybody, off would come her hat and coat. And she would take her place again at the stockroom guichet. Or desk in the typing pool. Or seat at the switchboard. As the case might be, once caught.

Each floor was separated from the next by three flights of stairs. They descended east, south, west – the fourth side was a level walk north. Miller had made up two flights on the girl before she noticed that he was hurrying. She then hurried too, but Miller found that he still gained.

Running on the level, Miller slowed to look. Just below, head bent to watch her feet moving, she was making jerky progress, as if hurrying had given her timing difficulties. Much easier to run up than down.

At the moment of thinking this, Miller crashed into a man in uniform.

'Going down, Sir?' asked old Hector.

'What do you think, man? Get out of my way!'

Couldn't he see, the old fool, that the woman might simply walk up again unscathed, if he took the lift down?

'Sorry, Sir. Thought the lift might be of some assistance.'

Hector's gammy leg had got him the job, but his gammy brain had never been mentioned. The creature had lengthened her lead. Like a great bat she was there, sailing down, monstrous as you please with her black coat flaring in the low wattage of the feebly lit staircase.

Miller went after her, taking leaps down each flight to make up the lost ground. He was decidedly shortening the distance between them when, on the level, he again crashed into someone. The place was full of these men in blue uniforms! They all had

their foreheads showing pink, as their peaked caps were jolted on to the backs of their heads. But it was Hector again!

'Going down, Sir?' asked old Hector.

'I thought you had a gammy leg?' said Miller.

'That's why I came down in the lift, Sir.'

Miller looked at him in amazement. 'Get out of my way,' he said. He shoved Hector, tottering on his gammy leg, through the open door of the lift and hastened on. But the prey had taken its chance - fairly flying!

Miller went down three flights like a man taking a hop, step and a jump. His feet skidded like a skater's on the smooth surface of the fourth side. But he heard nothing of the girl's feet on the metal stairs, though he kept her plainly in view, taking the turns in absolutely even rhythm. The face which looked back at him showed terror. With the terror on it the face was unrecognizable.

The arms of old Hector ended Miller's skid.

'Going down, Sir.'

'You're doing this on purpose, Hector.'

'I'm only holding you up, Sir.'

'If you hold me up any more, you'll get your cards.'

'Let me take you down in the lift, Sir.'

The very suggestion was absurd. They should be almost there, at the ground floor, by now. But looking down, floor after identical floor was revealed.

'Much quicker in the long run, Sir,' insinuated Hector blandly.

'Will you get out of my way, man?' shouted Miller. He burst from the protective arms and Hector stepped back into his lift. In a moment he would put his box into motion again, and blot her from view.

But there she was! Smoothly dwindling, as if on a rail. She bent her head back, so far that Miller thought her neck must snap. Her face was horribly distorted, panic-stricken.

He wanted to cry out to her to stop, not to be terrified, that he only wanted to talk to her about her reasons for leaving the building so early. But there wasn't the time. As he plunged on, he hated her for her terror.

Miller running, old Hector in his lift, reached the next floor together. Neither stopped. A puff of smoke appeared above the

cage – the old man was lighting his pipe! She was looking back all the time now, the floors below her receding empty and endless. It was as if new floors were being slotted in.

Miller wanted to cry out to her not to look back, that she would miss her step!

But there wasn't the time. And anyway she missed her step. She seemed to dive.

Miller dived too. It was against his deepest convictions, but he felt he had to dive now. Past an unimaginable number of stairs!

Miller was standing in the lobby with a light evening mist spraying him through the open doors. The lift gate was clicking open behind him and he turned as old Hector shuffled out of his cage, puffing at his pipe.

'Nasty old night, Sir. Going up?'

Miller shook his head and shivered. The road was empty but for a couple of parked cars glistening with mist, and a boy playing with something in the horse trough. He looked far too old to be playing with horse troughs.

'My daughter's boy,' said old Hector. 'He gives me a lift home. We call it the last lift of the day. He's a good boy to his family.'

'You need not keep him hanging about out there,' said Miller. 'After five o'clock I've no objection to his sitting in your den.'

'Thank you, Sir. He'd like that. Going up in the world, he'll say. He's a lively sort. How about you, Sir? Shall I take you up?'

'No, Hector. I'll stay here a minute.'

'Thank you, Sir. I'll be going on up now, if you have no objections. Sales get agitated about this time if I'm not there to help them on their way.'

Miller moved into the doorway. He watched the boy at the trough, serenely dabbling. He had something in the trough he was playing with. There came a slight grunt from behind, either from old Hector or from his lift, as the cage started on its upward journey.

Miller fixed his gaze on the boy and the trough. The sight soothed him. When people began to leave the building, calling *good night Sir* and loudly loathing the thickening mist, he still

watched the boy. He felt his staff knew, and he could not look at them. They came down, first one or two, dragging on their coats as they hurried, buttoning them up as they waited to cross the road, briefcases or gloves or whatever clenched between their teeth. Then the main bulk came clanking down like an army — *which way are you going? I'll walk you to the corner.*

Or if he did not hear that, he imagined it. He'd been one of them himself for thirty years. He knew the drill.

He was being nudged. By Harris. With his thick collar up, like a cast for a broken neck.

'What do you want?' said Miller.

'Double scotch, I should think,' said Harris.

'You'll be lucky. Singles for you, my lad, or I shall have Mrs. H. on my tail.'

'That's all right. No danger there. We have an arrangement: for every half hour I'm not home she pours herself one.'

'Jolly thought,' said Miller. 'Wish my old scrubber would lift her elbow. It might suit her to drink. Instead of which, she thinks. With the result that she's a thunk, instead of a drunk.'

'A little of each is best, I suppose,' said Harris awkwardly. 'Where do you fancy going? Eagle? Rose and Crown? Or how about walking up to the Hat and Feathers? It's been done up, the new manager's wife is a sweet creature, sausages eight pence, and I know a fair number of the crowd that get in there.'

'And you have shares.'

'I should have, the amount I spend in there.'

'Hat and Feathers then. But I've left my coat and hat upstairs.'

'I'll wait.'

'Do me a favour?' asked Miller. 'Get them for me?'

Harris frowned and scratched his chin. 'You're all right, are you?' he asked. 'I mean, you look a bit—'

'If I go back up,' Miller interrupted, 'it'll be half an hour before I get clear.'

'Fair enough,' said Harris. 'One coat, one hat. Earmuffs?'

'Just empty my cupboard,' said Miller, smiling for the first time.

'The chance I've been waiting for.' Harris stepped in with Hector.

Miller crossed the road to the horse trough. He stood by the boy for a minute, looking on. There *was* a family resemblance. The chin.

The boy wore an open-necked white shirt and sports coat. No pullover. His hands were wet and red from constant immersion in the cold water of the trough.

'I've been breaking the ice up,' said the boy. 'They can't drink if it's all iced over.'

'I should let the riders do their own dirty work,' said Miller.

'They might not notice it's iced over. They might think the horse didn't want to drink. You know what they say. You can take a horse to the water, but you have to break the ice if he's going to get his nose in.'

'We don't see many horses round here,' said Miller.

They both looked away, as if for horses.

'There might be one come by,' said the boy. 'The law for instance. Or some society girl.'

'It'll freeze over again almost immediately. It's too cold not to.'

'I see you don't have a coat on,' remarked the boy. He returned to the trough, though he had dried his hands, and flung a slab of ice violently on the pavement.

Miller shook each leg. With elaborate concern he fished a splinter of ice out of his turn-up.

'Sorry,' said the boy. 'But if I want to take ice out of here, that's my business.'

'Why don't you go in there with your grandfather till he's ready to go home?'

'Because I like to wait here, that's why.' As he spoke he moved to the other end of the trough, so that it was between them.

'I've told your grandfather you could wait inside,' insisted Miller.

'In the warm, like?'

'Yes,' Miller said eagerly. 'In the warm, till he's ready.'

'That's the trouble. If I was to go in the warm, he'd take his time and never go home. But while he knows I'm out here in the cold, he'll hurry himself up a bit. He's not a bad old bloke, but he's bloody slow, needs a bit of prompting.'

'But I don't want him prompted!' Miller exclaimed angrily.

'Well, you're going home, aren't you?'

'Perhaps, but I very often work late.'

'Not tonight, though?'

'No,' Miller admitted. 'Not tonight.'

'There y'are then. It's the same with grandfather.'

The boy stretched right across the trough for a piece of ice which was floating close to Miller. Miller snatched it away. The boy was still leaning forward when the ice slipped out of Miller's hand and fell back into the trough, splashing the boy's face.

The boy stood upright and wiped his face with his sodden handkerchief. 'You'd help me more,' he said with dignity, 'if you'd drop it *outside* the trough.'

'I'm not helping you,' flashed Miller.

'That's right you're not,' said the boy. 'I was doing all right till you come out.'

Miller took a couple of steps along the side of the trough. He wanted to take the boy by the shoulder and tell him that this was ridiculous, that he only wanted him to be warm while he waited to take his grandfather home, and that as his grandfather's employer he had a right to expect a full day's work from the old fellow, disabled or not. The boy should be his ally, helping to fit Hector into the scheme of things.

But the boy was looking at him warily. He moved away as Miller tried to approach.

'Just a minute—' began Miller.

'Yeah? You keep your distance!'

'Look,' said Miller.

He thrust his hand into the water and scooped out a piece of ice.

'Not twice you don't!' The boy bent swiftly to the pavement and before Miller could move again he had flung a piece of ice into the trough. A fine spray of icy water spread all over Miller.

Indignantly Miller hurled his own piece of ice at the boy. The boy was just rising above the level of the trough, having bent for a second piece. Miller's spinning disc of ice caught him immediately above the eyebrow, where a red gash appeared.

The boy continued to rise slowly. He raised his hand to his forehead and then looked at the blood on his fingers.

'You did that,' he said to Miller.

'Stop it,' said Miller. 'Let me help you, will you?'

'You'd kill me with your sort of help,' the boy said.

'We'll put a bit of ice on the cut,' said Miller. He leaned over the trough, dabbling for a clean piece. He cut his own fingers on the sharp edge, prising it free.

'Keep your hands off that ice,' said the boy.

'I insist you stand still,' Miller shouted. He hurled himself round the trough, in an effort to catch hold of the boy. But the boy had gone under the trough.

He stood opposite Miller, panting. Blood seeped from his cut, mixed with his eyebrow and trickled down his cheek. His tongue came out and felt for it. Miller saw fear and hatred in the boy's face. They stood looking at one another, breathing heavily.

'The worst is,' the boy said, 'that we've left almost no water for the cattle. That's what this is for, you know. Look, where it says Metropolitan Cattle Trough.'

'I'm sorry,' said Miller. 'I had no idea it would turn out like this.'

'Least said soonest mended,' said the boy. 'I'll forgive you if you'll help me put the ice back in. Then at least they'll have water when it thaws. What do you say?'

Miller sighed. 'All right.'

The street lamp was some distance away. The scattered fragments on the pavement had to be felt for. His hands throbbed. He knew the cold was getting into the joints, and dirt into his cuts. And the boy was using his feet to shoot ice under the trough to Miller, for him to grovel after. The supply seemed inexhaustible. He must have put more ice into the trough than the thing had originally held, and yet there was still more and more to pick up. Miller leaned with his cheek against the cold marble and thought that he must have done enough to be forgiven. Pressure of ice being shoved under the trough knocked him off balance. He was on his back, with ice shale all round him.

'Wondered where on earth you'd got to,' said Harris. 'Hope you haven't hurt yourself?'

'Shaken up, that's all,' replied Miller. He pulled himself to his feet by hauling on the lip of the trough. There was no sign of the boy.

'Not surprised you took a bit of a purler,' continued Harris.

'There's a devil of a lot of ice lying all over the place. Kids playing with this trough I imagine. Menace to public safety.'

'That my coat?' asked Miller.

'Let's brush you off first or you'll have all that filth on the lining. Slush all over you. Somebody ought to be sued for compensation.'

'My fault. Sue myself. Shouldn't have risked coming through all this.'

Harris rubbed vigorously with a handkerchief. He made the sounds of an ostler grooming a horse. Then he stood back. 'Why did you?' he asked.

'Post a letter,' replied Miller. 'That's fine now, thanks. ... They'll have to go to the cleaners anyway.'

Harris helped him on with his coat. 'Don't you post your letters through the firm?'

'Occasionally,' said Miller.

'I see,' said Harris. 'One of those, was it? I won't ask further.'

Miller began walking. 'Where's this pub of yours?'

The Hat and Feathers was electrically bright and new, but a kind of rubiginous glow from the bottles on the gantry soothed Miller. Madam commiserated, and even insisted on making a dressing for his fingers.

'You poor man!' She leaned over the bar and the bandage hung from her tapering fingers like a rosette. 'Let me put it on for you.'

Miller would have permitted the attention had he not discovered at that moment that the skin was not broken at all.

'I could have sworn,' said Miller.

'I know,' she said, 'I know *exactly*.' She smiled, as if she and Miller shared confidential information beyond the understanding of most people. 'It's the ice. When I handle ice I'm convinced I'm cut a hundred times.'

Miller flexed his fingers. 'Odd,' he muttered.

'The fall shook you,' she suggested.

'Something,' Miller admitted.

'I have a friend who gets confused—' she went on.

'I know where I am,' said Miller with heavy irony. 'I read the sign outside.'

'This friend was a racing driver,' remorselessly she continued.

'He was in a smash and now he has a plate in the back of his head.'

'I only fell over,' said Miller.

'I expect you came down harder than you thought.' Sympathy made the flower in her corsage tremble. 'People laugh at falls, but I don't.' Miller wanted to shriek 'It's a drink I want', but her plump bare arms obstructed the hand that would have reached out. He signalled frantically to Harris.

Harris took the hint. When he bought madam a drink their drinks were released. She accepted a 'shillingworth'.

'I always say that a whisky mac will go straight to the tips of your fingers,' she told Miller. 'So you'll be all right in no time. I said to Herbie, Herbie love, we must never be without Crabbe's Green Ginger for our specials. So you're my first special and I'm sure you won't be the last to come in here this winter after a fall...'

In the rain of her words, Miller spotted the rainbow. She could dispense some of this sympathy to Hector and his grandson, who had appeared that moment in the Public Bar. He put stiff fingers into his pockets and dragged out a clutch of coins. He clashed them on the shiny counter. Madam looked startled. 'Your friend paid,' she reproved him.

'I know,' Miller said. 'Ask those two what they'll have, will you?' She looked round, following the direction of his nod.

'Those two?' she asked, before moving.

'Those two.'

She went round the gantry and spoke to them. They looked at one another, looked at Miller, smiled, shook their heads.

Madam reported back. 'They say they're all right. They only came in for tobacco.'

'I want them to have a drink with me,' said Miller. 'Ask again.'

She brought back a different excuse this time. 'The old man says he's driving.'

'Nonsense,' said Miller. He forced a smile. 'It's only a lift, after all. Try again.'

Madam was bewildered. 'I can't *make* them have a drink.'

'Dammit!' exclaimed Miller. 'Perhaps you'd like me to shout across?'

Madam's lips set in a hard line. 'If you prefer the company in

the Public Bar,' she suggested, 'you can always go round there.' All the same she went back and whispered to Hector. Other drinkers in the Public Bar tried to eavesdrop, and everyone looked at Miller. He felt he was being scrutinized from all sides.

He mumbled into his glass, 'Buy a man a drink if I want.'

Harris was at him again. Old Nudger Harris! 'Perhaps they want to get home to their dinner,' Harris said. 'There's always another day.'

'Everybody is suddenly sentimental about home,' said Miller.

'Sentimental about their dinners, I expect,' said Harris. 'If the lunch they had was anything like the one I had today, tears will stream down their cheeks as the smell from the home kitchen meets their nostrils.'

'Oh, all right,' muttered Miller, 'don't go on. A pub used to be a refuge from that kind of talk. If they can't force one friendly drink down themselves, I'm not going to take on all comers to make them.'

But Madam came back all smiles. Old Hector had evidently said something teasing. 'They'll both have a beer,' she giggled. But the publican now took a turn.

'The beer's off!' the publican announced promptly. He made it sound like a competitor in a race.

'It can't be,' said Miller. 'You've only just opened.'

The publican rounded on him. 'We open twice a day. It *was* off, and it is off.'

'Well, put it on,' said Miller.

'Two hours a day is all I have to myself. I'm not running up and down to the cellar during those two hours.'

'They're over now,' said Miller. 'So put the beer on.'

'Ask them to choose something else,' said Harris pacifically.

'Somebody other than me will have to do the asking,' said Madam. 'That's for sure.'

'Shorts will do,' said Harris. 'Hand them a couple of Scotches. And if they're not happy with them we'll wrap them up and send them to Oxfam.'

Miller interrupted angrily. 'I want them to have what they want!'

'They don't want anything,' said Madam.

'They definitely want beer,' said Miller. 'Will you put on another cask or not?'

'All in good time,' said the publican. 'There are other customers besides yourself.'

'It's not *for* myself,' shouted Miller. Beyond the obstinate figure of the publican, who now measured a white-shield Worthington as carefully down the glass as if it were gelignite, he watched old Hector and the boy preparing to leave.

The sight exasperated him. He felt he had to act. He flung off his coat, for a start. Harris raised his eyebrows and stooped for it.

'If you won't,' Miller shouted, 'I will! I'll do it myself!' He dashed for the cellar door, shrieking 'Hang on!' to old Hector and the boy.

'Here, just a minute,' exclaimed the publican. He had just reached the tricky part of the pouring, and stood rooted while Miller sprinted. Miller was down the steep wooden steps before he had even set down glass and bottle.

It was colder in the cellar than it had been out in the street. All about him Miller could hear dripping noises. The transparent pipes wound like veins into the ceiling, pulsing with beer. He was bewildered on seeing so many, all apparently connected and throbbing, drawing on enough drink for a regiment of horses.

'Not sure which one, are you?' asked the publican. He stood at the head of the steps with arms loosely folded on his paunch.

'Decided to get on with it, have you?' said Miller.

'Decided to watch *you* get on with it,' tranquilly returned the publican.

'Don't play the fool. Obviously I was only trying to help.'

'Obviously I'm delighted. Shan't budge till you've succeeded. You'll find it hard to climb out of this cellar with my girth in the way here. I go fifteen stone you know. It's too much they tell me, but I've never been one for diets.'

Miller looked along the row of pipes, without seeing one empty. He licked his lips and tried to shake a cask to judge by weight, but it was wedged in its chocks.

'All right,' he burst out. 'You've had your game. Now which is it?'

'Unobservant.'

Miller curled his hand round a pipe. It was smooth and moist,

and the beer hissed under his palm as the cold ate into his flesh. 'This one?'

'You're not trying,' said the publican.

Miller blew on his palms. 'I should have kept my coat on.'

'I always do,' agreed the publican. 'However much you move about it only seems to get colder.'

Miller paced up and down between the double line of silvery casks. He lashed out with his feet at a couple, but they were stuck. He reached the bottom of the steps and glared up at the publican.

'I'll pull every pipe out,' he threatened.

'I don't think so.'

'How long is this going on?'

'You tell me.'

Miller turned away. Broodingly he surveyed the cellar. 'I bet there are rats down here.'

'Might be. But only as sleeping quarters. We don't believe in keeping beer on the wood any more. It's all pressure today. Much easier, though you don't seem to find it so.'

Miller walked back to the casks. He lined the first with its pipe and took a step left. Matched the second with its pipe. He said over his shoulder, 'System.'

'Should be interesting,' commented the publican. He dusted off a step and settled down heavily.

With the fourth pair matched Miller called 'Am I getting warmer?'

'More used to being cold, I should say,' answered the publican.

'But that's four right, and all working.'

'Look behind you,' advised the publican.

Miller looked, and there was an extra pipe! He uttered a cry and wrenched. The publican was shouting. He tugged and tugged at the slippery pipe in his hands, and suddenly he felt the publican behind him, grasping him around the shoulders. He lay back on the huge, briskety bulk, and their combined weight tore the pipe free.

A sulky, sighing eructation of beer and plaster came with it. Then, as they lay struggling on the concrete floor, it spewed its brown sticky fluid all over the pair of them. For a moment Miller still clung to the pipe, then it twisted out of his grasp and fell,

discharging with decreasing frequency and violence, and with fainter gurgles. Pinned down by the publican, he could feel the stuff running cold under his ankles. There were voices – Madam's and Harris's – plaintive in the middle distance.

'What's going on down there?'

'... fuss over nothing.'

And the publican's booming beside him. 'Fellow went berserk. Came charging down and started wrecking my pipes.'

'I was only trying to put the beer on,' Miller explained.

'It was never off,' said the publican.

Harris looked at his watch and finished his drink. He said in an apologetic tone, 'If you didn't need me, I ought to go on.'

'Yes, go on.'

'I really should.'

'Go on, go on . . . I'm sorry about this evening.'

'Who worries?' said Harris, unconvincingly cheerful. 'No one noticed that matters. I should get out of this morose state. Go to a show or something.'

'I could go home.'

'Why yes, of course! Naturally! Go home, I mean naturally, home *is* the place to go.'

'Is that where you just phoned, Harris? Did you just phone home?'

'Where else? Just to say I'm on my way. Nothing more to keep me in town.'

'Does your wife think of you, out with me, sitting here in the pub?'

Harris looked embarrassed. 'Not much entertainment in that, would there be? Think of you and me downing a quick one, not my Nell.'

'Mine's thinking about us. This minute. I guarantee it. Phone her for me, Harris?'

'Good Lord!' said Harris.

'You'd be doing me a service.'

'I wouldn't know what to say.'

'Say I'll be delayed a bit. The switchboard's closed down so I asked you to call for me.'

Harris slapped his palm with his gloves while he thought the

suggestion over. He suddenly smiled. 'We should always do that for one another.'

'Bless you,' said Miller.

But when he came back from the phone Harris looked disturbed.

'I don't think you should have let me in for that, Miller.'

'What happened?' asked Miller quickly.

'Nothing *happened*, but your good lady has some funny ways of expressing herself.'

'Sorry,' said Miller.

'I don't really want to be dragged into—'

'I've said I'm sorry,' said Miller. 'What did she *say*?'

'She blamed *me*.'

'What for?'

'Talked about a plot.'

'What plot? What are you talking about, Harris?'

'She said if I stayed with you this evening I might find myself in serious trouble.'

'But you said I was in the office?'

'She didn't give me time. She immediately assumed the worst.'

'What worst? Harris, don't let her bully you into thinking what she thinks. It's fierce, Harris. It's really terrible, the way she does that.'

'I don't know what to think.'

'Think anything but what she thinks.'

'I think they're waiting for me at home.'

Miller jumped up excitedly. 'Don't go for a minute, Harris. Watch, while I call her. You'll see, it'll all be smoothed over. I'll get her to stop thinking about you. I'll phone . . . we'll phone together . . .'

'Count me out,' said Harris. 'Your private life's your own affair.'

But Miller dragged him to the phone. But trying to get the right number was like trying to shoot with a bent rifle barrel. He reached numbers on either side, and when he got the right number he got the wrong exchange. Harris kept trying to interfere. 'Keep your fingers out!' said Miller jerkily. He appealed to the operator but was told that the number was unobtainable,

'Rubbish!' snapped Miller. 'If Harris can get it, it can't be unobtainable.'

'Better ask Harris to help you then,' replied the operator comfortably.

'You don't understand,' said Miller in despair. 'I can't let Harris ring again. That's precisely what we're trying to *avoid*.'

Harris was applying force to be free.

'You must be mad!' he grunted. 'Let me go, Miller. I'm asking you. Be serious. Think of tomorrow. We have to work together.'

Miller released him. He stared in astonishment as Harris bolted out of the pub. To the Saloon Bar in general he spread out his arms in an appeal for sympathy.

'I was trying to help him. The ungrateful bastard!'

Lucky with his taxi, which whistled down the back doubles, Miller was soothed. When they reached the block of flats and the porter told him that the young lady was almost certainly in, his mood became almost buoyant again.

The sequence of silly humiliations which the evening had already arranged for him had made him cautious of expecting too much. Had Paula been out, he would have given up. As it was he watched the floor indicator in the lift warily as he went up, as if the changing figures could lie, or miss out the fourth floor altogether. But there was no mishap. He went out into a soft carpet and padded down a corridor which, for all its apparent anonymity, was familiar and consoling.

He walked quickly to her door. She was not too keen that everybody else in the building should know of his comings and goings. About to press the buzzer, he suddenly remembered that he generally brought a bottle. Could he do nothing right this evening?

He dared not go back for one, lest she go out in the meantime. Should he tell her he was here, then go for one? She might want to come out too, and Miller wanted to stay in. Undecided, he teetered.

The door was opened, but now by Paula. Looking at him was a middle-aged woman, with a hat. The hat was one of those fixtures - Miller thought of it as being worn even in the bath, or bed. One of those which grows out of the head, against which the

hair thrusts or cuddles, like vegetation fighting a rock for a place in the sun.

He had met her somewhere. He tried to recall the meeting, while the woman fiddled self-consciously with the hat, half-recognizing him. She put on a silly smile – memory holding the door. She remembered then, while Miller still stared.

‘Good evening, Mr. Miller. I expect you want to see Paula.’

‘I gather she’s in,’ replied Miller.

‘At the moment she’s in the other room. But I expect it’s all right if you come in.’

Miller stepped in. ‘Yes, it is,’ he asserted. As she shut the door behind him he thought he remembered. ‘Thank you, Mrs. Potts.’

‘Mrs. Kettle actually. Don’t worry a bit, it’s always happening. Would you like to sit down while I shout through to Paula?’

Miller had beaten her to the invitation. Sitting stiffly, he said, ‘We met at Lord’s.’

‘At the flower show, I expect. Cricket’s too slow for me.’

‘I’m muddling everything this evening,’ said Miller despondently.

‘Paula tells me you work too hard. People today have to hold far too much in their heads. You must relax. Hat! Thank you. Coat too! Thank you. Now a cup of tea while we wait for Paula.’

‘Cup of tea!’ echoed Miller.

‘Better to have a cup than just sit here. We don’t know how long Paula might be.’

‘I’ll just look in and say hello.’ Miller half rose.

‘No!’ said Mrs. Kettle emphatically. At the door to the kitchenette she softened. ‘Not yet,’ she compromised.

Miller sank back and sighed. Ludicrous to be kept out of Paula’s bedroom. He knew the geography in there as well as anybody. The hat popped back round the door.

‘Come in here with me and be cozy. Pure fug. Very homey.’

Draggingly Miller went into the kitchenette. He sat down on a stool by a Formica-topped table. The fug was made up of grease-laden steam.

‘Boil a pint in here and the whole kitchen is warm as toast. The rest of the flat is icy. The bedroom!’

‘I know,’ growled Miller.

'I know you know,' she murmured coyly. She tapped his wrist with a plastic strainer. Miller was disgusted. How squalid that this friend, aunt, home-help, whatever she was, should connive.

'Kettle's boiling its head off,' indicated Miller.

'Yes. It behaves itself with me. My name, I expect. Funny you should think I was Potts. Wish I was. Pots don't behave as well with me. My husband always says the dinner may not be up to much, but he can always console himself with a good cup of tea to finish. Are you married?'

'Yes,' said Miller. 'Hasn't Paula told you?'

'Paula's very understanding. Very discreet. But I don't need to be told. I can always tell a married man. Always have their minds on two things at once.'

'I don't think you ever gave her a shout,' said Miller desperately. 'She doesn't know I'm here.'

'Are you expected home, then?' asked Mrs. Kettle.

'Not immediately.'

'That's all right then. We can be casual. You weren't expected here either, were you? I mean, you never phoned?'

'I had some bother with the phone,' muttered Miller.

'Not expected at home. Not expected here. Dear oh dear. Bit of an in-between, in fact.'

'This evening was out of the ordinary.'

'Paula's very understanding of anything out of the ordinary. Such a sweet girl. Very tolerant.'

'I'm not,' said Miller.

'Drink your tea. You may want more sugar.'

Miller drank. It tasted only marginally of tea. A psychic rather than a physical relationship between herb and hot water.

'How long is she going to be?' asked Miller, as she refilled his cup and topped up the pot.

'I should have offered you the evening paper. There on the chair.'

'It's yesterday's.'

'I expect she's taken today's in with her. When she comes out I'll get it for you.'

Miller was exasperated. 'When she comes out I won't want it.'

She considered him sympathetically. 'She is taking rather a

long time,' she conceded. 'But don't you worry. She's very understanding.'

'Stop *saying* that!' exclaimed Miller. His voice had become high and querulous. 'I don't want to be told about Paula. I know about her. And it's not at all understanding to sit in her bedroom reading today's paper, while I sit out here reading yesterday's!'

'Goodness me, she won't be reading the paper, you funny old impatient thing. Would you like me to use the phone and say you're delayed?'

Miller jumped to his feet. He felt he could stand no more. The humiliation was tingling all over him, like pins and needles. Would this mad, hatted woman never stop being polite, and just go away?

'You have your hat on,' he said. 'Were you perhaps going somewhere when I called?'

'I always have my hat on,' she replied, 'in case people think I'm overstaying my welcome.' She ran to the door and peered into the lounge. She closed the door again quickly. She was behaving, it seemed to Miller, just like a prostitute's maid. He took a deep breath to say that he would leave, but she broke in on his thoughts, triumphantly.

'I hear them,' said Mrs. Kettle. 'Finished at last. They have been a long time. But Paula's the most understanding girl I know.'

'What do you mean, *them*? Who are *they*?' asked Miller. 'Is somebody with Paula?'

Mrs. Kettle frowned. 'You really aren't very understanding, are you?'

Miller took her by the wrist and pulled her away from the door. In the middle of the sitting-room was Paula. She had obviously made no effort whatever to change for the evening, though her hair was set. With her was a man, who turned at the noise of Miller yanking the door open.

'Harris!' exclaimed Miller.

Harris looked bewildered.

'I'll never forgive you for this, Harris!'

'Will somebody explain?' asked Harris.

'Yes, I'd like that,' said Miller. 'Somebody explain what Harris is doing here.'

Mrs. Kettle had recovered herself. She hissed loudly to Paula,

'He makes mistakes about names. Kept calling me Mrs. Potts.'

Paula said with a hint of impatience, 'You know I was having the flat done up? This is Sam Stevens. He's been marvellous. Why didn't you ring and say you were coming? I thought that was understood.'

'I thought he'd understand,' said Mrs. Kettle. 'But he didn't.'

'I *don't* understand what Harris is doing here,' said Miller thickly.

Stevens smiled uncertainly. He turned round inquiringly to Paula. She shrugged her shoulders. 'I'll ring you, Sam,' she said, 'when I know what it's all about.'

'Fine,' said Stevens. He hesitated. 'Perhaps I should stay for a while?'

'Bless you, Sam. But don't worry. Whatever it is, it'll sort itself out.'

'I'll push on, then,' said Stevens. He glanced at Miller. 'Nice to have met you, Mr . . .'

'Miller,' said Miller.

'Knows his own name, anyway,' said Paula.

Stevens went out. Miller ran to the door and watched him go down the corridor. He was puzzled. No question but that the man's walk was utterly unlike that of Harris. He closed the door against further sight of the hybrid.

Paula was at his elbow. 'What's all this about Harris?'

'He thought I was somebody called Potts,' came from the back of the room.

'Never mind about Potts,' said Paula quickly.

'And never you mind about Harris,' said Miller. 'I'm going home.'

'Why don't you ring and tell her you're coming,' said Paula.

'That's what you'd like, isn't it,' said Miller.

'I really don't know what you mean. I was only interested to know whether you treated her with any more consideration than you do me.'

'All bloody martyrs,' exclaimed Miller. 'All the bloody lot of you.'

Paula agitatedly hunted for a cigarette, upsetting a pot and knocking magazines to the floor. 'For Christ sakes stop behaving, and give me a cigarette,' she said. She was a big woman, amongst

whose features only a small snub nose and an eye-hugging curl of hair suggested any feminine willingness to compromise.

Her eyebrows went up as Miller tossed her the packet. 'Spontaneous combustion built in?' she asked, after a moment.

Miller threw her the matches.

'Charming,' said Paula. 'Thank you for your *charming* visit. Am I to be told at all what you have on your mind? I imagine you haven't come here *only* to be rude?'

Miller flopped down in the armchair, spent and dejected. His need to hit back at the succession of tormentors was turning on himself. At that moment he felt he could have killed himself. He waved his hand weakly and dumbly, pushing the pivotal elbow into the firm corduroy of the chair-arm, as if this would give him back his firm contact with reality.

Mrs. Kettle was ready to go. A collection of miscellaneous parcels and flowers and knick-knacks seemed suddenly to have leapt into her arms from all corners of the room. She was just able to raise an arm against the weight dragging on it to bid them stay put.

'I *must* go. You'll get on better without me. I *have* enjoyed it, Paula. *And* meeting Mr. Miller again.'

Miller did not notice. He only stared at her. Surely he had the right to be rude, just once in a lifetime?

'You might have said good-bye,' said Paula, when the door shut.

'Good-bye and all that,' vehemently Miller called out.

Then silence. They sat on opposite sides of a low table. On it was a phone. Miller thought the crimson colour foul.

'It clashes with the carpet,' he said.

'Go on, use it,' she urged.

'You want me to.'

'I don't give a damn what you do,' she flared. She bounced out of the chair and ran into the bedroom. Miller rose too, and leaned against the door jamb. She was crying. Bound to, sooner or later. She was not one bit attractive. He could not understand how he had ever thought she was.

'I'm not very understanding,' said Miller. He turned back to the phone.

His wife might have been waiting for the call. It rang only once and she was answering.

'I'm taking the 8.45,' said Miller. Paula appeared in the doorway to the bedroom.

'Shall I meet you at the station?' suggested his wife.

'No. I'll walk.'

'All right,' she agreed. 'Shall I leave the porch light—?'

'No,' said Miller. 'I know where I live.'

'See you then. You've had dinner?'

'That's a thought,' admitted Miller.

'I'll get you something.'

'Good. What are you doing?'

'Nothing much. Thinking.'

'Thinking what?'

'Things. Tell you when I see you.'

'Won't be long now.'

He slowly put down the receiver. Paula passed him, emptying an ashtray. Looking intently into the bin, rubbing the ashtray with a cloth, she said, 'I'm glad I only ever saw you like this the once, this last time. The act doesn't suit you. It's not you. But act or not, it comes to the same thing.'

'Yes,' said Miller.

As he let himself out of the flat, she was still standing with the ashtray in her hand. She was wiping it clear of the last particle of ash. Miller hesitated. Then she lifted it, defiantly ignoring him, and held it up against the light. She huffed on it, and rubbed. She might have been expecting someone to drink from it.

'Someone other than me,' said Miller to the empty corridor, and started home.

On the train he felt safe again from the thorough forking he had had in town that evening. Back on the rails, in every sense. He regretted only that he had told his wife not to meet him. The car was a good place for a conference, a kind of neutral ground where public civilities were still observed.

She might be in bed, the house in darkness, if he arrived much after ten. 8.45 plus five minutes late leaving the station, plus fifty minutes' travelling time, plus thirty-five minutes' walk. Result 10.15. He could knock ten minutes off the walking time. The train might make up the five minutes. She *might* wait up an extra few minutes. The promise of a bite to eat was heartening. She must have allowed a few kind thoughts to creep in.

As he came out of the station, he heard his name called. She was, after all, waiting. Almost hidden in the shadows of an otherwise empty park, the car had all its lights out.

'Good girl,' he said eagerly, as the headlights came on to show him his way over the icy stretch.

'Good girl,' he said again, as she got out from under the wheel. 'You must have been cold, waiting.'

'A bit,' she said, 'seeing the heater's still on the blink. You were going to get it fixed.'

'This week-end,' he promised.

'Watch the ice.'

'Not much in town.'

Out here, on the little used country roads, the ice lurked in patches, half-thawed, irregular, unpredictable. Miller sucked his teeth, anxious.

'Don't suck your teeth.'

The car went into a skid. As he lost control Miller ceased to fight it. Limp at the wheel he watched the cumbrous shapes on the roadside start out of their dead stances and sweep wildly round them. He could only watch, as powerless as if he had been in a submarine tank. The car swung round, and round again, and round again. Then it came to rest gently against a pile left by the snow plough.

Miller laid his head on the wheel. The car creaked uneasily.

'You got out of that marvellously,' she said.

'That awful feeling one has in dreams,' groaned Miller. 'Seeing the danger but not being able to prevent it.'

'You were entirely right to give in to it.'

'In a way,' said Miller, 'the whole evening's been like that. Hell, I've had.'

'But you've come through.'

'That's all I need now, a crash. Perhaps you'd better drive.'

'Stuff!' she replied briskly. 'You're doing fine. You're past the worst, anyway.'

She sat serene as Miller reluctantly engaged gear.

She remained calm when, after half a mile, it happened again. This time Miller could see the patch coming, and there was room either side to pass. But he drove directly over it, and helplessly accepted the certain skid.

Stiff in the sit-up-and-beg position he murmured, 'Here we go

again!' and the landscape wheeled around them. He caught sight of his wife's face: she might have been looking into a shop window. Then a lamp-post came into vision, bearing down, accelerating. Miller flung up both his arms before his face and waited for the crunch.

But there was no crunch. Off the road the tyres bit into gravel. A fusillade struck the fenders, but the car trundled peaceably back on to the highway.

'Better and better,' commented his wife.

Miller braked; very gradually they came to rest.

'I'm in pieces,' said Miller.

'We can't just sit here.'

'You take the wheel.'

'What on earth for?'

Miller was bewildered. 'After two skids,' he stammered, 'surely . . .?'

'What skids?' asked his wife. She had turned to face him. To his alarm Miller picked up an almost imperceptible twitch of her lips.

'The skids,' whispered Miller.

She smiled. Miller flung himself out of the car. He stood for a minute fumbling for the flashlight in the glove compartment, then he dashed back along the stretch they had just travelled, looking for the skidmarks. But there was none. The ice was clean and tidy, with no dark scorings.

He ran across the patch, to its far end, flashing the light in all directions; but he knew now that he would find nothing.

His wife followed him. She stood with her hands locked behind her back. The blank patch of ice lay between them.

'Found anything?' she inquired.

'Found out what I've suspected,' replied Miller. His hands were shaking so much that the light from the torch flickered all over the road.

'But you had to be told,' she said contemptuously. 'Suspecting isn't thinking.'

'I'm thinking now,' said Miller. Grimly he tried to keep the torch still.

'You'll only think back. Think forward.'

'I'm thinking how you lost me a friend.'

'But you're not thinking *forward*.'

'And how you thought me into losing respect at the office.'

'Think on,' she adjured him ironically.

'Thought me into making an idiot of myself with two employees.'

'Well, and then?'

'Thought me into spoiling my welcome in a pub.'

'Such a shame!'

Miller plodded on, into the area of deepest pain. 'You wrecked my relationship with Paula!'

She laughed at him. 'No, my dear,' she jeered. 'You fouled that one up yourself.' She turned away.

'Stop!' cried Miller.

She was walking back to the car. He suddenly was terrified - that she would get in, drive away, leave him to walk forever, abandoned, down icy country roads leading nowhere. With only *her* thoughts for company. He reached out to grab her, but she evaded his clutching hand. He ran.

His feet were slipping on the ice. Beneath him black tread-marks appeared racing by. But when he looked up, the trees were unmoving lines, dark in the geometry of fixed stars. To move he had to look down.

His hands came about her neck, and they were both running. He looked back at the stars, to stop the running. He tightened his hold and shut his eyes.

'What are you thinking?' asked his wife. 'Why have you shut your eyes?'

He opened them. Slowly he unclenched his hands from the wheel.

'I thought I was strangling you,' said Miller.

'That's what I thought,' she said.

John Sladek is a young American writer living in London. He sees forms as manifestations of Man's incessant striving to standardize, equalize and ultimately emasculate, and thus another package of horrors which we have created for ourselves. It may be hard to see 'Anxietal Register B' as a short story, but it nevertheless has a place in this collection, not only as a cautionary statement of disapproval as to the direction our society seems to be taking, but also because it is a genuinely disturbing creative work. Try filling in the form and see what I mean.

ANXIETAL REGISTER B

by John Sladek

Directions.

READ CAREFULLY. Before answering any of the questions below, be sure to have all pages of this form, in order. Fill out in triplicate, using ballpoint pen or, preferably, indelible pencil. Press hard. PLEASE PRINT. Sign name to all copies.

1. State full name at present: _____
2. Full name at birth, or baptism: _____
3. Give any aliases, abbreviations, or nicknames by which you have ever been known: _____
4. Attach copies of birth and baptismal certificates.
5. Social security number: _____
6. Name on your last income tax return: _____
7. Date: _____ 8. Date of tax return: _____

- 210 9. State your full permanent address: _____

10. Where may you be quickly reached by: a) Mail: _____
b) Telephone: _____
c) Telegram or cable: _____ d) Messenger: _____
11. List every address at which you have resided, since birth, in chronological order. Include every address, with the following exceptions: a) Hotel accommodations in the United States, Mexico or Canada, for stays of up to or less than three days, occurring more than five years ago. b) Accommodations at U.S. Embassies, in other than an official capacity, for any duration, occurring more than seventeen years ago. c) Antarctic expeditions not using APO addresses. ALL OTHER ADDRESSES MUST BE SHOWN, WITHOUT EXCEPTION. Note: extra sheets (Form AR-B Supplem) may be attached.
- Street address: City: State: Date from: Date to:

12. Occupation: _____

13. Name and address of company where you are presently employed/
were last employed: _____

13a Last position held:

14. Salary: _____ 15. Name of superior: _____

16. Starting date: _____ 17. Terminating date: _____

18. Attach references. 19. If unemployed, give reason: _____

20. Why did you leave your last job? _____

21. Give your entire employment history, except for your last or present job. List all employment in chronological order, and include part-time employment. Note: Extra sheets (Form AR-B Supplem.) may be attached.

Company name & address	Position	Supervisor	Salary	From	To	Reason for leaving
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22. Have you ever been fired for: a)Theft: ____ b)Embezzlement: ____
c)Dishonesty: ____ d)False References: ____ e)Absenteeism: ____
f)Tardiness: ____ g)Loafing: ____ h)Inefficiency: ____ i)Personal
reasons (Explain): _____
23. Have you ever quarrelled with fellow employees? _____
24. Have you ever had difficulty with employers? Describe: _____

25. Have you ever stolen any property belonging to an employer, no
matter how small in value? _____ 26. Have you ever feigned
illness? _____
27. Name of your bank or banks? _____
28. Explain any foreign bank accounts: _____
29. Bank Account Number(s): _____

30. Present balance(s): _____
31. Number and amount of withdrawals during past year: _____

32. Father's name: _____
33. Mother's maiden name: _____
34. Attach birth certificate and marriage licence.
35. Have you ever been arrested a)As a minor: ____ b)As an adult: ____
c)Misdemeanor? _____ d)Felony? _____ e)Convicted? _____
f)Sentenced? _____
36. Give full details of any arrest and/or conviction, including name of offence, whether convicted, sentence and/or fine. Include all traffic offences other than overtime parking.

37. Do you love your mother more than your father? _____

38. If you do not love your mother, explain: _____

39. Circle which of the following you have ever suffered from:

a) Rheumatism b) Arthritis c) Chronic fatigue d) Rupture
e) Tuberculosis f) Night sweats g) Nocturnal emissions
h) Nightmares (frequent) i) Sleepwalking j) Ringing noises
k) Chronic or severe headaches l) Bronchitis m) Homosexual
tendencies n) Hot flushes o) Tumours p) Cancer q) Gastric
ulcer r) Gonorrhea s) Syphilis t) Asthma u) Hay fever
v) Severe cough w) Trenchmouth x) Hepatitis (jaundice)
y) Diabetes z) Anaemia aa) Poliomyelitis ab) Heart attack
ac) Stroke ad) Heart murmur ae) Blindness af) Deafness
ag) Tunnel vision ah) Astigmatism ai) Unexplainable pains
(Explain) aj) Visions ak) Epilepsy al) Impotence
am) Obesity an) Chronic nausea ao) Drug addiction (Explain)

ap) Alcoholism aq) Double vision ar) Frequent or severe accidents
as) Amnesia at) Laryngitis au) Malnutrition
av) Precognition aw) Cleft palate ax) Harelip ay) Multiple digits
az) Paralysis (specify).

40. Have you ever had any serious physical or mental disorder? Describe, specifying dates, physician, treatment, hospitalization etc.:

41. Briefly describe your own condition at present: _____

42. Are you under medication? Describe: _____

43. Attach medical records and physician's affidavit.

44. Have you ever undergone surgery? Describe: _____

45. Have you all your natural teeth? (Attach chart) _____

46. Describe any amputations, giving dates and reasons: _____
-
47. Have you: a) Both kidneys b) Both lungs c) Ovaries
— d) Prostate e) Gall bladder f) Both eyes g) A bladder
h) A complete stomach i) A complete colon j) Both breasts
k) Lower jaw l) Nose
48. Have you ever undergone sterilization? _____
49. Castration? _____ 50. Hysterectomy? _____
51. Do you feel sexual desire for, about, during:
— a) Those of your own sex b) Those of both sexes c) Children
d) Your mother e) Your father f) Your son g) Your daughter
h) Sister i) Brother j) Babies k) Cadavers l) Animals
m) Birds n) Fish o) Insects p) Cripples q) People who
hurt you r) People whom you hurt s) People of special
professions (describe) t) People in particular costumes
(describe) u) Watching others in the act of coition

v) Peeping at naked persons w) Drinking blood x) Drinking
 urine y) Drinking semen z) Eating faeces aa) Looking at
 photographs ab) Looking at drawings ac) Drawing pictures
 ad) Telephoning ae) Confessing sins af) Listening to music
 ag) Dancing ah) Exposing one's sex organs to someone else
 ai) Anal entry aj) Axilial entry ak) Oral entry al) Nasal
 entry am) Rape an) All members of the opposite sex,
 regardless of age or condition ao) Watching movies
 ap) Watching television aq) Performing your ordinary work
 ar) Masturbating as) Urinating at) Defecating
 au) Menstruating av) Wearing clothing belonging to the opposite
 sex aw) A particular part of another's body ax) Of your
 body ay) Crowds az) Rubbing against people ba) Clergy
 bb) Weapons bc) Machines bd) Plants be) Trees bf) Sunsets
 bg) People of other races bh) Apparel bi) Dangerous or
 unusual surroundings bj) Inanimate objects bk) Mathematical
 propositions bl) Thoughts bm) The law bn) God
 bo) The act of filling out a form

52. List all the persons in your household:

Person:	Age:	Sex:	Income:	Source:	Relation to you:
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53. Why do you believe you have been asked to fill out this form? _____

54. Describe briefly your feelings about filling out this form: _____

55. Describe in detail other forms you have been asked to fill out, explain their use, and estimate your performance: _____

56. Describe your character in detail, giving examples of your

behaviour to illustrate points. Note: extra sheets (Form AR-B Supplem) may be attached.

57. Do you believe in God? _____ If 'no', explain: _____

58. Have you answered all the above questions? _____

59. Have you answered truthfully? ____ 60. Have you ever lied? _____

61. Have you ever stolen anything? _____

62. Why do you believe that you have been asked to fill out this form? _____

63. If you are merely reading this form, why do you believe that you have not been asked to fill it out? _____
- _____
64. Have you been asked to fill out this form? ____ 65. To read it? ____
66. Not to fill it out? _____ 67. Not to read it? Explain: _____
68. Compare this form with others which you may have read or filled out, whether or not you were asked to read them or fill them out:
- _____
- _____
69. Be sure your comparison is fair and correct. If it is not, you may rewrite it on extra sheets (Form AR-B Supplem). If you do so, be sure your revision is correct.
70. Was your original comparison correct? _____ Fair? _____ If not, explain: _____
- _____
- _____

71. If you revised your comparison, why? _____

72. Write your life history in brief, explaining in passing your answers to questions 11, 21, 39 and 51 fully. Take as much time, and as many extra sheets (Form AR-B Supplem) as necessary, but do not lie, omit, falsify, distort or invent. If there are any portions you genuinely do not fully remember, you will be asked to complete and attach three copies of Form WH6, Hypnotic Drugs Waiver of Rights. _____

73. Sign the following statement:
I hereby agree to submit to a Keeler Polygraph ("Lie Detector") examination, to be conducted by or in the presence of a

psychiatrist and police officer, during which I will endeavour to answer all or any questions about my past life as truthfully as I am able.

(X) Signed: _____

Witnessed: _____

74. Describe your feelings upon reading and signing the above statement: _____

75. Do you believe you have anything to hide, about your past life?
If not, explain: _____

76. Have you anything to add, regarding the answers to questions 11, 21, 33, 39, 51, 72 or 75? _____

77. Do you ever have feelings of anxiety? _____

I swear that all the statements above are true
and complete and that I have not attempted any
falsification, on penalty of perjury.

(X) Signed: _____

Witnessed: _____

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